

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: BREAKING THROUGH THE MARGINS: PUSHING
 SOCIOPOLITICAL BOUNDARIES THROUGH HISTORIC
 PRESERVATION

Portia Dené Hopkins, Doctor of Philosophy, 2016

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Psyche Williams-Forsen
 American Studies

“Breaking through the Margins: Pushing Sociopolitical Boundaries Through Historic Preservation” explores the ways in which contemporary grassroots organizations are adapting historic preservation methods to protect African American heritage in communities that are on the brink of erasure. This project emerges from an eighteen-month longitudinal study of three African American preservation organizations—one in College Park, Maryland and two in Houston, Texas—where gentrification or suburban sprawl has all but decimated the physical landscape of their communities.

Grassroots preservationists in Lakeland (College Park, Maryland), St. John Baptist Church (Missouri City, Texas), and Freedmen’s Town (Houston, Texas) are involved in pushing back against preservation practices that do not, or tend not, to take into consideration the narratives of African American communities. I argue, these organizations practice a form of preservation that provides immediate and lasting effects for communities hovering at the margins. This dissertation seeks to outline some of the major methodological approaches taken by Lakeland, St. John, and Freedmen’s Town. The preservation efforts put forth by the grassroots organizations in these communities faithfully work to remind us that history without preservation is lost. In taking on the critical work of pursuing social justice, these grassroots organizations are breaking through the margins of society using historic preservation as their medium.

BREAKING THROUGH THE MARGINS: PUSHING
SOCIOPOLITICAL BOUNDARIES THROUGH HISTORIC PRESERVATION

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to three wonderful women who inspired me to be the change I wish to see in the world.

Denise Douglass

Geraldine Douglass

Laverne Easter

Also, to the communities include in this study; Lakeland, St. John Missionary Baptist Church and Freedmen's Town. I am forever changed by your courage, faith, and tenacity in saving the places you love and cherish so dearly. I hope this dissertation helps to shine a light on the amazing work you are doing in your communities and that your story can be a testament to others going through a similar struggle to preserve places that matter.

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Chapter One: When Monuments Aren't Enough: Saving African American Historic Sites from the Bulldozer

*"Faith without works is dead."*¹

While sipping coffee with three community preservationists from the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition (FTPC) one fall Sunday evening, I am reminded of what enduring strength looks like. We are fresh from the streets of preservation; a libation ceremony performed earlier that afternoon at the intersection of Andrews and Wilson in Houston's Forth Ward. Every third Sunday of the month community members meet on this corner for prayer and a ritual pouring of libations.² The ceremony signifies the calling of ancestors from Freedmen community for wisdom and protection. This ritual is one piece of a larger preservation effort led by FTPC to save the remaining 125-year-old bricks that line the streets of Freedmen's Town.³ "It is a long and tough road ahead," we are told by Doris Ellis, President of the Coalition and one of the most visible faces in the movement.⁴ The late September Texas heat has produced beads of sweat that she carefully wipes from her brow with the back of her hand. Her voice is low and serious. Her message is simple; "We must continue to pursue justice and ask God for guidance in every matter. Regardless of the outcome on October 1, we know that we will keep pushing through and trust God that His will be done."⁵

It's Sunday, so the steady and mechanical clanging of construction has halted for the weekend. Monday morning, however, construction will resume, alerting community members that their neighborhood is, once again, in transition. Those who appropriated the area of Freedmen's Town, a historic section of Fourth Ward in Houston, Texas, have taken to affectionately calling it 'Midtown.'⁶ What was once a vibrant African American neighborhood dating back to Reconstruction has undergone decades of gentrification.⁷

Freedmen's Town has morphed into a bustling yuppie enclave adjacent to downtown Houston and the trendy Montrose area. Much of the rich tangible cultural history of African American lives is demolished. Aside from the African American Library at the Gregory School,⁸ which is maintained and operated by the city of Houston, there are few historical artifacts and buildings left in Freedmen's Town. A few row houses, the three larger residences' of Freedmen's Town's leaders and the bricks are all that remain to tell the story of the historic forty block African American community that once stood west of Downtown.⁹ FTPC is currently ensnarled in a legal battle centering around these remaining vestiges of community history. The most recent battle focuses on the 125-year-old bricks that were laid by former slaves. These bricks represent the very bedrock of this historic African American community (Figure 1.1). Now, grassroots preservationists like Ms. Ellis are literally laying their bodies on the ground to stop the city from removing the remaining bricks from the site (Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.1 Freedmen's Town historic brick pavement. Photo Courtesy of Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition.



Figure 1.2 Doris Ellis, President of the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition protesting the removal of the historic bricks, 2015. Photo Courtesy of Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition.

The libation ceremony ends and the groups disperse. Some move quickly to their cars and leave while others congregate in the empty parking lot across the street from the Rutherford B. H. Yates Museum.¹⁰ Once the site of a single family home, the lot is now wedged between a dilapidated turn of the century home (another Coalition preservation project) and a string of newer townhomes. Across the parking lot we can see onto the neighboring street, and a discussion ensues about the history of an 1894 home. The front façade has been refashioned to the owner's liking; green trim and red shutters; no doubt the homeowner's imaginative re-creation of a "charming cottage."¹¹ The landscape tells the story of the tensions between gentrification and preservation, but the steady encroachment upon the historic Freedmen's district is also evident; a hodge-podge of condos; mixed income, single family homes; historic homesteads; empty overgrown lots, and public housing units.

"Breaking through the Margins: Pushing Sociopolitical Boundaries Through Historic Preservation" explores the ways in which contemporary grassroots

organizations are adapting historic preservation methods to protect African American heritage in communities that are on the brink of erasure. This project emerges from an eighteen-month longitudinal study of three African American preservation organizations—one in College Park, Maryland, and two in Houston, Texas—where urban renewal, gentrification or suburban sprawl has all but decimated the physical landscape of their communities.¹² While each of the communities of study offer insight into the various forms of marginalization, the ways in which they are affected by physical destruction to their cultural resources differs by location and class strata. Whereas the college park community has suffered at the hands of urban renewal during the 1970s and 1980s and gentrification during the early 2000s, the Houston communities fall victim to class based suburban development and gentrification during the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s respectively. As a result of this dismal situation, local preservationists and everyday citizens fight to save the cultural legacies of the somewhat fractured institutions (families, schools, churches, community centers etc.) that remain in the community.

Each community included in this study has formulated ways to counteract the physical devastation they face as development continues to press forward. Despite their geographic differences, Lakeland in College Park, Maryland and Freedmen's Town and St. John in Houston, Texas, the three communities share a common narrative, all were founded by Freedmen during or shortly after Reconstruction. The other commonality is all are currently engaged in battles to preserve their physical/ tangible cultural resources amid the encroachment of urban renewal, gentrification or suburban development.¹³ This is not a new issue.¹⁴ The three forms of marginalization (urban renewal, gentrification and suburban development/sprawl) have displaced African American

communities across the country for many years, and a closer look at the ways in which communities are fighting back is warranted. Urban renewal, as I am defining it, involves the use of federal and state funds to rebuild areas of the city which are deemed too old or unsightly for modern sensibilities. Often oriented towards meeting the transportation needs of a swelling urban population, urban renewal also involves the displacement and/or massive subsidized relocation of community members. At times, these practices can be indiscriminate (all on the east side must relocation) or discriminate (all except these “selected” buildings will be demolished). Similarly, gentrification is the process of displacing poor citizens, mostly people of color, living in ethnic enclaves in or near urban centers and replacing the marginalized group with a middle to upper class, mainly white, demographic. As I will address in the Freedmen’s Town chapter, the processes of urban renewal and gentrification can work in tandem across the history of marginalized communities. Finally, I borrow Dolores Hayden’s definition of suburban sprawl from *Building Suburbia: Green Field and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. Hayden defines suburban sprawl as “low-density, single purpose, residential or commercial construction in locations distant existing public services and infrastructure.”¹⁵ The process involves changing the built environment to include housing, services, and mixed use development that caters to the needs of the new demographic.

Despite these various encroachments and facing monumental obstacles, Lakeland, St. John, and Freedmen’s Town have taken the reins of cultural preservation at the grassroots level by organizing preservation activism and championing public awareness activities that highlight the rich histories of their communities.¹⁶ The difficulties each organization faces are complicated by the age and health of the organization’s members,

the conflicting interests of community organizers, the competing agendas of institutional stakeholders (as they materialize and dissipate) and the ongoing struggle to preserve that which is in constant threat of removal.¹⁷ These stories are all too common across the communities included in my study.¹⁸

My research indicates that each grassroots organization utilizes a similar preservation toolkit to accomplish their agenda. The common efforts documented across the organizations include activities that range from youth outreach programs; heritage weekends; libation ceremonies; anniversary celebrations; collecting oral histories, images, and artifacts to establish and maintain community archives; creating house-museums and traveling exhibits; initiating beautification projects; protesting through civil disobedience; and filing court injunctions to prohibit further destruction of the community's landscape. These groups also collaborate with other preservation organizations and educational institutions to retrieve, collect and restore the material artifacts and built environments of African American historic sites.

Grassroots preservationists in marginalized communities are simultaneously involved in pushing back against preservation practices that do not, or tend not, to take into consideration the narratives of African American communities. Consequently, I argue, these local, grassroots organizations practice a form of preservation that provides immediate and lasting effects for communities hovering at the margins. This dissertation seeks to outline some of the major methodological approaches taken by the grassroots organizations in Lakeland, St. John, and Freedmen's Town. In taking on the critical work of pursuing historic designation, protection and preservation, these community activists are engaging in one form of social justice activism. Though it may not be consistently

identified as such, particularly even by those engaging in the work itself, these grassroots organizations are pursuing social justice and breaking through the margins using historic preservation as their medium.¹⁹

About the Study/ Significance of Project:

When I registered for *Social and Ethnic Issues in Historic Preservation* in the fall of 2009 I did not expect to walk away with the seed of a dissertation.²⁰ The preliminary research I conducted in Lakeland while serving as a graduate assistant the previous summer laid the foundation for my experience.²¹ It was in this class that I was introduced to the Lakeland community and where I started thinking about and engaging landscapes in a very different way.²² The course considered the social and cultural factors that contribute to the disproportionate preservation of African American history.²³ After the course concluded, I continued to develop my research in Lakeland during the spring and fall of 2010. Working alongside the Lakeland Community Heritage Project and other community volunteers brought another dimension to my understanding of cultural landscapes. It enlivened my senses to the ways in which historic storyscapes are built and preserved in marginalized communities.

Upon returning to Houston, I continued to examine the nuances of preservation in marginalized communities. Like Lakeland, St. John and Freedmen's Town were addressing social justice issues through historic preservation. I found that each organization was utilizing preservation in a more nuanced way compared to how their white counterparts employed historic preservation. I examined each preservation organizations' efforts using the following overarching questions: *What does it take to do the work of African American historic preservation? What does it look like to do the work*

of African American historic preservation? To shape the answers to these questions, I considered three sub-questions: What methods and strategies have grassroots preservation organizations in marginalized African American communities developed to pursue social justice agendas? How have female preservationists shifted socio-cultural power through grassroots organizing, resistive historic preservation efforts and the construction of counter-discourses? What role do educational institutions and local governments play in advancing the historic preservation agendas of grassroots organizations rooted in social justice restorative history?

Primarily, this dissertation proposes a new methodological toolkit for grassroots preservation groups serving communities on the margins. This toolkit developed from my observations working with three grassroots preservation organizations in three different African American communities. The evolution of developing a methodological toolkit was complicated.²⁴ To begin, I first explored the applicability of tactical urbanism as a methodological approach to African American preservation.²⁵ “Tactical Urbanism,” the current term used to categorize community-driven efforts of historic preservation, is defined by Laura Pheifer in “The Planner’s Guide to Tactical Urbanism” as “small-scale, short term interventions meant to inspire long term change... [Tactical urbanism] is a city building approach featur[ing] five characteristics:

1. A deliberate, phased approach to instigating change
2. An offering of local ideas for local planning challenges
3. Short-term commitment and realistic expectations
4. Low risks, with possibility a high reward; and
5. The development of social capital between citizens, and the building of organizational capacity between public/ private institutions, non-profit/ NGO, and their constituents”²⁶

Within the African American communities studied, tactical urbanism did not address all the needs of the organizations, particularly for those in the infancy of their organization and the preservation planning process. Multiple interviews, participant observations, and historical analyses informed my understanding of the circumstances leading to, and the issues emerging from, preservation on the margins.²⁷ These organizations required a more tailored plan that did not singularly focus on the economic vitality of their sites, but rather the social and cultural meanings embedded within each endangered site. I found that methodologically, each organization was primarily following a similar pattern;

1. Drawing attention to their cause and stressing the urgency of the situation;²⁸
2. Rallying support and raising money;²⁹
3. Collaborating with resource-laden institutions;³⁰
4. Seeking historic designation.³¹

The methods included in this study, and outlined in greater detail in the forthcoming chapters, serve as successful models of preservation efforts in marginalized communities. When deployed, each preservation method can, in part or in whole, effectively and positively impact communities on the brink of erasure. My methodological toolkit is particularly useful because it emerged out of the experiences of grassroots activists and the subjugated knowledge rooted in marginal experiences.

“Marginalized” does not have to necessarily mean inherently powerless. Mary Corbin Sies illustrates the ways in which “marginal” can be a useful term, “reminding us on the one hand [that] racial ethnic minorities experience tremendous constraints in access to some kinds of power and resources [and yet] for some people the margins provide an important site of differential knowledge and strength from which to engage in political activity to define and achieve their own interests.”³² Those situated on the margins are,

therefore, not without their own set of discourses, strategies, tactics, and resistive practices that aid in defining their own paths through geographies of power.

Marginalization does however, come with disadvantages. For example, while pursuing historic designation and resources for their physical cultural resources, many community members were met with various ideological road blocks at the local and state levels. As I will demonstrate in the forthcoming pages, “proving” the significance of historic sites to those outside the community was a difficult and arduous process. Additionally, because many participants came with only a basic knowledge of historic preservation, the discourses and professional practices preservation remained challenging to navigate. For example, historic site designation within the communities offered little in the form of legal protection from further desolation. The symbolic designation of important sites lacked the legally-binding protection that the community organizations sought. As such, once designation was granted the additional level of legal protection required additional resources, volunteers and time, all of which the organizations lacked in great quantity.

This dissertation also examines the ways in which historic preservation efforts in African American communities simultaneously address multiple facets of marginalization.³³ African American community preservation is situated within a racialized landscape that privileges white preservation narratives. Historic marginality in society and within the field of preservation was central to the concerns of the grassroots organizations included in this study. In order to holistically represent the complexity of the sites they seek to save, preservation activists from the margins have to grapple with the multiple dimensions of the communities’ marginalization. Their efforts reflect an

organic attempt to address and combat multiple issues concurrently. In creating restorative historical narratives each organization addressed how institutional racism and systematic oppression affected the lives of their community members. This was perhaps most evident in the rhetoric found in the state historical marker applications and the subsequent verbiage on the markers placed in their communities. It was also unmistakable in the *off the record* conversations that occurred between organization members regarding how best to break the cycle of exclusion in a society dominated by whites.³⁴

This project is timely and significant. The United States is witnessing the steady gentrification encroachment of African American, Latino, and working-class neighborhoods. Marginalized communities of color already face social, cultural and political-economic obstacles that impede on preservation efforts. Adequate housing, access to fresh food and affordable health care, improving educational facilities and addressing high crime rates are the most serious community concerns. Combatting environmental injustice, lack of access to municipal services, and racial profiling and surveillance necessitate additional community attention and resources, leaving historic preservation and cultural heritage among the lowest ranking priorities for many communities.

Sites of Inquiry

This dissertation seeks to uncover the methods that have been adopted by and adapted specifically for African American grassroots heritage preservation organizations at three locations of preservation: families, communities, and collaborative preservation activities provided by academic institutions.³⁵ Communities of color must be evaluated

and theorized closely to unearth the casual and not so subtle nuances of community boundaries.³⁶ The efforts highlighted in this study epitomize the contentious nature of historic preservation and social justice work in African American communities on the margins. The sites I examine, particularly families and social institutions like churches and schools, are central to the process of cultural production in African American communities.³⁷ The families I include in this dissertation are located within or have strong communal ties to Lakeland, St. John and Freedmen's Town. I drew from my own role as family preservationist to form a working understanding of the role preservation plays in family units and shaping relationships. During the course of this study, my own familial preservation experiences, in part, were shaped in response to the death of loved ones.

Take for example, an incident I experienced within my own family in 2011 just before my maternal grandfather passed away. On the last full day of my grandfather's life he called all "his girls" to his bedside to talk to us about important next steps. He went over his last wishes; what he wanted us to do with the house, how he wanted to be buried and what he had set aside and planned for my grandmother in the event he went before she did. Just before he shuffled us all out of the room, he reached over to his bedside chest and removed a ring from the drawer. This ring, a thick gold band with a cluster of five diamonds on the top, had been his, passed down from our Uncle Seal, and he wanted it to go to my little brother Bryant.³⁸ At that moment my grandfather had bestowed us with the title that so many women inadvertently hold within African American families and communities; historic preservationists.³⁹

This ring had passed from hand to hand within our family, following the male lineage through four generations of Douglass men. It represented both the passing of a life and the extension of our family memories and bloodline across time and space. It carried with it a story, more sensationalized with each retelling but nevertheless a strong family narrative of male bonding that would be protected and preserved by the women of my family. Scholarship that recognizes the significance of family heirlooms helped me to draw out the layers of meaning infused in heirloom objects. Furthermore, oral history interviews and material culture analyses provided a snapshot into the ways in which the families included in this study shaped their family narratives through oral tradition and material culture objects.

The creation of social institutions within marginalized communities is an integral step in building community sustainability. As such, social institutions, like churches and schools, offer another site of cultural production for analysis in this dissertation. In each community of study, both churches and schools played a pivotal role in shaping the collective identity of individuals. In Lakeland, the Rosenwald school site, Lakeland High School, and the two historic African American churches (conveniently located across from one another) were the centerpieces of the walking tour during heritage weekend. St. John's church also at one time served as a school during segregation and is remembered by some informants as the site of some of their earliest and fondest memories. Finally, in Freedmen's Town the multiple churches that served the community, and those that still do, shape the cultural identities of their members and congregate.

Elsa Barkley Brown highlights the importance of social institutions, particularly the church, in African American communities in her article "Mapping Black Richmond."

Barkley Brown explains that “The church as a central foundation of the black public sphere was central to African Americans; realization of fully democratic political discourse. In the immediate post slavery era, church buildings doubled as meeting halls and auditoriums, as a political space occupied by men, women, children, ex-slave and formerly free, literate and nonliterate. The availability and use of the church for mass meetings enabled the development of political concerns in democratic space.”⁴⁰ The protection and restoration of these sites is central to the agendas of the grassroots organizations included in this study, particularly because of the deeply imbedded and personal attachment felt by community members to each. As such, this dissertation examines the place-making process inherent in the creation of families and social institutions within the communities of study.

Theories and Scholarly Framework

Within the field of historic preservation, traditional methods of evaluating a site’s significance often fall short of addressing the social and political processes that shape meaning in marginalized communities. As such, many sites of communal significance have been overlooked, devalued, or dismissed as irrelevant or frivolous. To address this issue, I seek to establish a flexible methodological toolkit for grassroots organizations pursuing historic preservation in marginalized communities.⁴¹ It is my intention to intervene in prevailing discourses on historic preservation and contribute to the ongoing discussion of how best to address the needs and agendas of preservation groups in marginalized communities in the 21st century.

This dissertation is intended to appeal to preservation practitioners and community activists who are interested in preserving the built environment, particularly

African American built environments.⁴² This dissertation does not seek to solely draw the reader's attention to the commonality of experience across preservation groups in marginalized communities, but rather to directly address the nuances of interpretation marginalized communities bring to the preservation of community narratives.

The theoretical frameworks of critical race theory, intersectionality, and space and place studies aid in identifying the common denominator of experiences across the communities being studied.⁴³ My dissertation focuses on preserving the built environment in African American communities in new way using the sites of significance discussed in the previous section. My examination of each site stems from an analysis of the physical landscape, oral histories, participant observation and self-ethnography. As I will illustrate in the forthcoming chapters, the grassroots preservation organizations within these communities are central to the process of reimagining site histories through their construction of counter-narratives. The political struggle for resources and significance of interpretation permeates the experiences of the communities included in this study. Their struggle demonstrates *who* has the power and voice to interpret and that who is interpreting is just as important as *what* is being interpreted.

Methodological Framework

The overarching methodological framework for this dissertation is freedom and liberation from institutional systems that suppress African American narratives, historical legacies, and voices. Getting to know the everyday citizens who actively resist the people, ideologies and institutions that systematically marginalize their communities was a central component of my research agenda. Preserving cultural heritage was one path to liberation routinely engaged in by my informants. In speaking with my informants about

their experiences I found that grounded theory of resistance proved substantially more rich than the theoretical framing of the practice. Every time a heritage weekend was planned, a libation poured, an oral history collected or a recipe passed down, the cultural legacy of those who came before them was honored. On the surface, it may seem that these rituals were simply a nod to tradition. When unpacked however, it became clear that these cultural sites of memory also carried with them vestiges of resistance stemming from an era when African American cultural traditions were routinely suppressed. In reflecting on my own participation in these rituals, I am reminded of the poignant work of Robin D. G. Kelley. In “We are Not What We Seem: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” Kelley discusses tactical practices of resistance in marginalized African American communities. He states,

once we explore in greater detail those daily conflicts and the social and cultural spaces where ordinary people feel free to articulate their oppositions, we can begin to ask the questions that will enable us to rewrite the political history of the Jim Crow South to incorporate such actions and actors...⁴⁴

Examining the ways in which resistance emerges through historic preservation points to an awareness of the racial politics within a particular place or time. It also provides a space to explore the agency of individuals who subversively navigated those politics on a daily basis.

Methodologically, my research aligns with Kelley in that it considers the ways in which marginalized groups, particularly the African American working class, engage in resistive practices of historic preservation from the margins. However, it takes these arguments a step further by integrating African American historic sites and their interpretation as resistive mechanisms from the margins. As will be discussed in the literature review, the African American historic site and the battle over its interpretation

is part of a larger discussion of agency, power, and institutional representations of blackness in historic preservation.

Methods

Because I worked extensively with African American communities, my methods had to very much be grounded in practice. In selecting my research approach for this study, I wanted to employ methods that were accessible to even the most novice researchers. Not only because my intention was to build a workable toolkit, but also because in the process of completing my research I was also actively training volunteers for the preservation organizations. I constructed a toolkit consisting of self-ethnography, oral history, archive and repertoire, material culture, landscape and historical analysis. These methods allowed me to engage directly with the sites of study and community members in an organic way. Throughout the process I gave lectures and led workshops to teach youth in the community how to approach historical inquiry using these methods. One of the other things I did was serve more as a participant and observer and less of a notetaker. As I will address in the next section, at times participant observation provided its own set of challenges to navigate.

Limitations of Study

It is important at this juncture that I contextualize my experience as a volunteer researcher and participant observer as well as outline some of the limitations inherent in this type of research.⁴⁵ In each community, my involvement as a researcher was greatly influenced by the nature and context of my initial contact with community members. In many ways, the experiences I have had in navigating the politics of research in these

communities has mirrored those experienced by ethnographers and cultural resource consultants.⁴⁶

In Lakeland, I was an active participant-observer in the process of preservation, working alongside seasoned scholars and community members to piece together historical narratives and build stronger communal ties. In Freedmen's Town, I was an participant observer who, despite coming into the community at a time of heightened sensitivity to outsiders, was able to build working relationships with the community's preservation organizers.⁴⁷ The legal battle between the FTPC and the city of Houston further complicated the flow of information from the Coalition to a an outsider lik myself.⁴⁸ Finally, with St. John I felt an overwhelming sense of belonging that caused me, at times, to overestimate my relationships with some informants.⁴⁹

Take for example, an incident that occurred with some members of the FTPC. After one Sunday libation ceremony, (Figures 1.3 and 1.4) a few members reconvened at the Midtown Café for an early dinner. Among them were Catherine Roberts, co-founder of the Rutherford B. H. Yates Museum; Ms. Lue Williams, Freedmen's Town resident and Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church congregation member; and Chris Dangle, freelance writer and photographer.



Figure 1.3: Community Libation Ceremony, February 2015. Photo Courtesy of Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition.



Figure 1.4: Libation cup for the ceremony, February 2015. Photo Courtesy of Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition.

Settling at a table in the back near the porch (“to feel the evening breeze,” Ms. Lue insisted), we recapped the day’s events. Being new to the group, I was briefed on the preservation victories and defeats within Freedmen’s Town.⁵⁰ As I began to jot down notes from our discussion I heard the tone of my dinner mates change. Instead of the fluid discussion that had ensued before my note taking began, the tone shifted to measured and calculated. Sensing the uneasiness that my actions had caused, I surrendered the notepad and pen and instead choose to just listen.⁵¹ I stared intently into the eyes of each informant, trying to connect with their struggle and pain.⁵² Ms. Lue was nearly moved to tears when she recalls that day in 2008, when Mt. Carmel met the wrecking ball; “And do you know that wreckin’ ball swung four times before a single brick was lost? That’s how well the church was built you see... the pastor and the men built that church brick by brick to last, not like today how theys [sic] build things.”⁵³

My near misstep at dinner could have potentially caused months of trust-building to collapse had I not recognized the change in my informants' comfortability in my note-taking. In Linda Williamson Nelson's article "Hands in the Chit'lins: Notes on Native Anthropological research among African American Women" she reflects on an experience of a similar mis-step with informants.⁵⁴ Gathering data on black women's oral narratives, Nelson identifies the moments in which her own voice was unmistakably clear among her informants, ultimately forcing her to "recognize that the extent to which [she] could claim insider status would not be consistent from informant to informant and from place to place."⁵⁵ As Nelson writes in "Chit'lins," "while the sharing of racial, gender and class membership with informants is my unquestionable qualification for insider status in its broadest sense, each interaction in the field with a new informant revealed the variousness in their individual views of me as a homegirl, that is, someone who shared their perceptions of reality and has an intimate understanding of their life experiences."⁵⁶

Introspectively exploring my role as volunteer researcher within Freedmen's Town, St. John, and Lakeland allowed me to peel away the layers of narrative that were too laden with my voice and bring forth the voices of those who sought to tell their own stories.⁵⁷ In doing so, my research agenda shifted from explanatory to exploratory, and produced much deeper and more valuable data than that which would emerge if I would have remained at the center of the narrative.⁵⁸ Nelson asserts that in order to do this "we [as researchers] cannot fail to acknowledge that the various corners and large spaces of our own enculturation cause us to view and be viewed by other insiders, as either focal or peripheral members of the group."⁵⁹ Nelson was particularly instructive because of the sites of analysis— family networks, churches, and community, I am employing in this

study. With each, my access to collect data relied on my ability to silence my own research agenda and instead allow an organic flow of information to emerge from the experience itself.

Literature Review

Most current historic preservation literature falls short of addressing all of the intricately woven layers and multiple dimensions of preservation work done by grassroots activists in African American communities. In this dissertation, I borrow terms like urban renewal, gentrification and suburban sprawl (already defined), place memory and historic storyscapes to draw out some of these layers. First, more scholarship on urban renewal, gentrification and suburban sprawl is needed to uncover the various moves and counter-moves employed by stakeholders. In Freedmen's Town, for example, I learned historic designation does not always ensure protection from redevelopment. Since 1984, Freedmen's Town has held historic designation and is listed on National Register of Historic Places. This designation, however, is simply honorific, and did not stop commercial development from continuing to encroach upon the community. In fact, while poring over city permitting records I discovered some commercial developers who stated that the historic significance of Freedmen's Town was something they planned to highlight through their design of public spaces (parks, walking trails, gardens etc.). When the area was eventually gentrified, plans to highlight Freedmen's Town history fell by the wayside. Displacement, forced removal and structure condemnation were all strategies utilized by the developers to cherry-pick prime real estate in the community. The residents' voices and needs were ultimately dismissed in the final phase of development, and trust broken between the community and the city planning office. In the media, there

was little public outrage or call for protest. In fact, some articles in the *Houston Chronicle* championed the developer's efforts to drive out the "crime and vagabonds" in the area.⁶⁰

Secondly, scholars need to develop theoretical frameworks that speak to the experiential knowledge grassroots preservationists deploy when interpreting heritage sites. Within preservation, the connections we make to people, events, and places tie us intellectually and emotionally to the built environment through the process of memory and memorialization. Dolores Hayden's *The Power of Place* is an excellent starting point to understanding site interpretation and place memory in the margins. Hayden borrows the term "place memory" from philosopher Edward S. Casey, asserting,

"it is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding it in features that favor and parallel its own activities. We might say that memory is naturally place oriented or at least place supported.' Place memory encapsulates the human ability to connect with both the built and natural environments that are entwined in the cultural landscape. It is the key to the power of historic places to help citizens define their public pasts."⁶¹

Similarly, in *Place, Race and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Preservation* Ned Kaufman's concept of storyscape helped me to examine the ways in which places have stories attached to them which drive heritage narratives.⁶² Kaufman defines storyscape as "the imprint of personal and communal stories on the environment."⁶³ As heritage lends itself to building collective identity, a place of heritage significance within a community wields great power. Place memory and storyscape bring the everyday vernacular into focus. Each was beneficial in helping me tease out the ways in which grassroots preservationists are pushing back from the margins. In the pages that follow, I outline four main bodies of literature, historic preservation, cultural landscapes, socioeconomic

issues, and power that I engage to frame my understanding of the gaps in scholarship regarding African American preservation efforts.

Historic Preservation

To date, there is no available toolkit that addresses *both* the historical discourses and material realities of African American marginalization while simultaneously engaging the politics of historic preservation. Additionally, the dense and jargon-laden National Preservation Act of 1966 is difficult to navigate for beginner preservationists.⁶⁴ While there are some generalized chapters in edited editions that allude to the efforts of African American grassroots preservationists, few studies singularly focus on examining the ways in which marginalized African American community organizations are producing restorative historical discourses and nuancing practices of preservation within their community in the process. Additionally, few works aid grassroots preservationists in the navigation of federal preservation policy. In an effort to address this absence in scholarship, the National Trust for Historic Preservation published a twenty-five-page pamphlet in 2012. “Preserving African America Places” aids grassroots organizers in navigating the federal preservation policy and understanding the key players and procedures, networks, resources, and legal and financial tools available to protect historic properties.⁶⁵ To address the “various strategies for preserving and honoring historic places associated with African American history” the booklet includes six case studies that demonstrated the vastly different outcomes of African American preservation across the country. “By saving African American landmarks,” Leggs notes, “we can stimulate revitalization and foster interest in places that today seem to exist without history or meaning. Indeed these places can serve as anchors reviving our sense of community.”⁶⁶

This booklet is an excellent resource to community preservationists on two major fronts. First, it encourages grassroots organizers to “think like a businessperson and develop a workable, flexible plan,”⁶⁷ and provides real-world examples of successful African American preservation projects.⁶⁸ Second, the booklet lays out the accomplishments of the National Preservation Act of 1966 and the network of preservation agencies available to assist in the process of grassroots preservation at local, state, and federal levels. This aspect of the booklet, along with the six case studies, is arguably its most beneficial contribution. “Preserving African American Historic Places” uses easily accessible language and informational charts to explain the National Preservation Act of 1966 to grassroots preservationists unfamiliar with the processes of preservation protection at the local, state and federal levels. The “Preserving African American Historic Places” booklet is also a useful tool for community preservationists because it highlights the main accomplishments of the National Preservation Act of 1966, and provides an introduction to the networks available for grassroots preservationists in the beginning stages of their projects. While the booklet does an excellent job of laying out some of the necessary networks and tools of preservation, it stops short of offering a methodological toolkit for preservationists working in African American communities.

The scholarship of Angel David Nieves comes closer to developing a toolkit for marginalized community preservation projects. Nieves’ scholarship explores community heritage projects in post-apartheid South Africa and provides an analysis of the ways in which the landscape is scarred by the wounds of apartheid. The black citizens of the townships are forming grassroots collectives to revitalize and rebuild local communities

through the practice of historic preservation and creation of a community-based museum.

Nieves asserts,

“efforts to recognize historic places, such as sites of political unrest, as a means to enhance citizen participation in late or newly developing democracies. Much of the history of the anti-apartheid movement takes place in the townships in what many heritage professionals would consider to be ‘the mundane’ and ordinary structures and environments of the poor. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a different set of criteria and strategies for documenting and preserving these important sites.”⁶⁹

Nieves’ work speaks volumes about the uphill battle communities of color face as they attempt to write their histories back onto the landscape and into the national memory. He argues, “these sites can be seen as viable ‘tools’ for social justice and human rights through a renewed process of civic engagement in grassroots community-based museums.”⁷⁰ Nieves work is useful in conceptualizing the role community heritage projects have in identifying and preserving historic sites, particularly places of social unrest and political upheaval.⁷¹

The struggle for visibility in national preservation discourses is a common theme across the historic preservation field. Norman Tyler notes in his book *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles and Practice*, that while the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 is recognized as “undoubtedly the most important historic preservation legislation ever passed by Congress,” the report that spawned this act is really what changed the perspective of preservationists.⁷² This new perspective in preservation facilitated a partnership between local, state and federal preservation efforts, and built a register of nationally recognized, “historically and architecturally significant building sites, structures, districts, and objects.”⁷³ However, currently there are very few places listed that are related to African American heritage sites.

The issue of significance limits the type of sites that are included on the register. Grassroots preservation efforts have the capability of constructing insurgent narratives that shift the paradigm of significance and offer alternative interpretations of historic sites. But the central question within historic preservation still stands: Who gets to determine what is “historically significant” and worthy of preservation? The “Who” in this question suggests the belief that there is an governing body of experts who deliberate on the significance of places and things.⁷⁴ Randall Mason considers the ways in which significance arguments structure historic preservation in “Fixing Historic Preservation: A Constructive Critique of “Significance.” He writes, “a statement of significance gathers together all the reasons why a building or place should be preserved, why it is meaningful or useful and what aspects require most urgent protection.”⁷⁵ Once defined, significance is used as a basis for policy, planning and design decisions.”⁷⁶ For example, the traditional impulse within the field of historic preservation is to privilege the wealthy and white⁷⁷ or examine the avenues in which African Americans provided service for those groups.⁷⁸ Mason cautions against getting stuck in the old paradigm of

“‘fixing things’, literally and metaphorically, noting ‘preservation’s ‘fixing’ mentality, rooted in the fabric-centered traditions of the field, has gotten transferred to how we think about significance. This has led us to ignore the essential nature of significance—which is that as an expression of cultural meaning, it must be expected to change, involve multivalence and contention, and be contingent on time, place, and other factors.”⁷⁹

Mason suggests, “newer thinking about preservation recognizes that significance is made, not found. It is socially constructed and situational, and it recognizes that appraisals of significance may have as much to do with the people and society making them as with any actual site.” In this sense, this study seeks to provide a platform for insurgent⁸⁰ historical narratives, particularly as they emerge from the historic preservation efforts currently taking place in marginalized African American communities. Insurgent

historical narratives, as they are identified and defined in this dissertation, are those that are constructed by members of the marginalized community. Insurgent narratives address misconceptions and/ or misinformation about the community while also serving as a platform for marginalized communities to assert their voices in local, state and national preservation discourses. It is through the construction of these insurgent narratives that many African American communities take the opportunity to tell their own stories on their own terms. Each insurgent narrative builds upon constructions of significance for historic sites within the community. Within this study, the grassroots preservation organizations took a leading role in constructing significance arguments that addressed both tangible and intangible community heritage sites. Though some landscapes included in their significance arguments may seem mundane (for example, “The Cut” in Lakeland or “the front porch” in Freedmen’s Town), these are the sites of political activity, protest, fellowship and unity for community members.

Insurgent narratives are part of a larger political discourse within historic preservation. Sites of heritage significance within the community could also simultaneously be a site of trauma. Kate Clark writes of this political struggle over significance on contested terrain in "In Small Things Remembered: Significance and Vulnerability in the Management of Robben Island World Heritage Site." Clark asserts,

"Robben Island is an extremely complex place in heritage terms because it represented a mosaic of significance to many different people at different levels and for different reasons. On the one hand, it is of international significance for its association with Nelson Mandela and his colleagues; on the other it is typical of a number of prison islands-- Alcatraz, Rottneest off Fremantle, the isthmus of Port Aruthur, St. Helena-- which are of heritage significance."⁸¹

Historic preservation sites are regularly entangled in debates over significance and relevance, particularly when issues of political struggle and social injustice are at stake within the historical narrative. The cultural management of such highly politicized spaces

like Robben Island represents the messiness of preservation. In each community, and on the agendas of every preservation organization included in this dissertation, the discussion of how best to address sites of trauma was present.⁸² How should these sites be remembered? What lessons can be gleaned from their removal? The scholarship of Nieves, Mason, and Clark help to *begin* the process of thinking through these questions. Each scholar provides preservation strategies with tangible results for marginalized groups seeking inclusion in public history discourses.

Cultural Landscapes

The grassroots preservation organizations included in this study are moving into the field of cultural landscape analysis through their identification and preservation of historic places and heritage sites within their communities. Cultural landscape analysis is a method that enjoys a broad application among human geographers, sociologists and linguists. It has also been appropriated by community activists on the margins who seek to consider multiple intersections of identities and political discourses embedded in the landscape. Analyzing cultural landscapes also involves engaging directly with cultural artifacts.

The excavated rubbish burn site behind the Rutherford B. Yates Museum is a prime example of the ways in which discarded everyday objects tell a story about the people who once lived in Freedmen's Town. Archeologist James Deetz explores the ways in which architecture, foodways and ceramics have been influenced by African Americans during the 17th and 18th centuries. Writing in *In Small Things Forgotten*. Deetz explains that, "historical archeology can add to our understanding of the American experience in a unique way by looking not at the written record alone but at the almost

countless objects left behind by Americans for over three and a half centuries.”⁸³ He attributes much of the uniqueness of African American culture to the “complex mixing and reformulation of components of both cultures [African and European] which took place, particularly in the American South.”⁸⁴ This process, known as creolization, is the interaction between two or more cultures to produce an integrated mix which is different from its antecedents.”⁸⁵

The process of creolization touches on the larger issues of power, dominance and resistance as they materialize through objects within society. In this regard archeologist, Paul Mullins draws our attention to the phenomenon of “multivalence,” examining “why rather commonplace objects were considered pivotal scenes of social struggle to African-American consumers and racist ideologies alike.”⁸⁶ He suggests that, “consumer culture was fundamentally structured by race and racism...all Americans fashioned distinctive positions within emergent consumer culture, [and] after the Civil War such positioning persistently was accented by efforts to appropriate empowering White privileges or to evade demeaning racial caricatures.”⁸⁷ Mullins envisions “an archeology that examines race and consumption [that] illuminates pervasive material and social contradictions that have significantly influenced American life in the last 150 years.”⁸⁸ In dealing with African American material culture, Mullins suggests we cannot use the same cookie-cutter research methods of traditional archeology.⁸⁹ Similarly, when building upon the concept of multivalence through the framework of historic preservation, the importance of saving African American vernacular landscapes comes into focus. The barbershop or juke joint, marking a site of everyday interaction, stretches out from the monotony of everyday life and becomes a storyscape for historical meaning to emerge.⁹⁰

This study applies the same line of thinking to African American preservation as well. Cookie cutter methods do little to expose the issues of power, dominance, and resistance, or acknowledge the ways in which African Americans navigate the very systems that marginalize their communities. For example, each community included in this study faced challenges locating and securing archival records and public funds to propel their agendas forward. As I will address in the forthcoming chapters, the institutional racism kept many African American histories out of the archives during the late 19th and early 20th centuries or simply did not document them at all. Institutional racism manifested again during the late 20th and early 21st centuries when local and state preservation agencies required archival records to substantiate the community's origin narrative. Often this criterion was difficult to obtain, inconstant with oral history testimonies, or altogether nonexistent. Relying on archival documentation to validate origin narratives does not take into account the realities of why these absences in the archive took place. More importantly, grassroots organizations are poised to address these absences and somewhat fill the gaps by conducting their own research and contributing artifacts and narratives to the underdeveloped local and state archives. In this way, grassroots activists can reshape the same mechanisms of marginalization once used to exclude their community histories.

In *Sustaining Identity, Recapturing Heritage: Exploring Issues of Public History, Tourism, and Race in a Southern Town*,⁹¹ Ann Denkler examines “the extremely complex and important public history site[s] that embodies, echoes, and reflects African American history and memory and the contemporary racial tensions that underlie [them].”⁹² Denkler's work addresses issues of how dominance and power play out on the

landscape by deconstructing a slave auction block in Luray, Virginia.⁹³ She captures the political terrain of local preservation through the oral testimony of one of her lead informants, a gentleman named Bill, who presided over the most visible and prestigious heritage association in the town. Denkler lays out a clear path for us to see how multiple narratives, agendas, and preservation initiatives can collide, especially surrounding issues as difficult to discuss as racism and slavery in the south. Based on her experiences collecting oral histories, performing cultural landscape analyses and doing ethnographic research in racially charged environments she concludes that, “new methodologies and perspectives are needed for unearthing African American History.”⁹⁴

Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods situate present day New Orleans as a racialized space in which “the materiality of the environment is racialized by contemporary demographic patterns as shaped by historic precedents.”⁹⁵ A focus on post Katrina experiences of the African American population of New Orleans “reconfigured the already racialized space... and brought into clear focus, at least momentarily, a legacy of uneven geographies of those locations long occupied by *les damnés de la terre*/ the wretched of the earth: laborers [sic], the underdeveloped, the criminalized, the refugee, the kicked about, the impoverished, the abandoned, the unescaped.”⁹⁶ McKittrick and Woods’ analysis is particularly powerful in understanding the ways in which “black geographies disclose how the racialized production of space is made possible in the explicit demarcations of the spaces of *les damnés* as invisible/ forgettable at the same time as the invisible/ forgettable is producing space—always, and in all sorts of ways.”⁹⁷ While my dissertation picks up on the scholarship of Deetz, Denkler, McKittrick and Woods, it diverges from their work at the site of preservation activism. The methods

utilized by the organizations included in this support my argument, and provide a methodological framework for the toolkit that emerges from my research.

Socioeconomics/ Class and Power

An equally important component of my research is the study of class and power.⁹⁸

The lens of race provided a starting point to discuss marginalized community preservation efforts, but a socioeconomic lens adds an additional layer to my analysis.

Class remains a difficult concept to grasp, and scholars and grassroots preservationists alike must tease out the class issues inherent in their scholarship and activism.⁹⁹

Intersections of marginalized identities are clearly evident in the ways in which laws are structured during the Jim Crow Era. Two influential scholars, David Delaney and Denis Byrne, have examined the racialized landscape of the Jim Crow South and apartheid in Australia. David Delaney describes these orientations in *Race, Place and the Law, 1836-1948* writing that, “geographies of power can be thought of as those spatial configurations that reflect and reinforce social relations of power.”¹⁰⁰ Geographies of power are often held in place by laws, particularly black codes, that sought to maintain the status quo.¹⁰¹

Social archeologist Denis Byrne calls landscapes such as these “nervous.” Byrne writes, “It almost goes without saying that racial segregation, by its very nature, is a spatial practice. It is about the separation of people in space and the rules and devices that are set up to achieve this.”¹⁰² Byrne’s concept of nervous landscapes provides a space for scholars to explore how the “dominate culture spatially controls a population’s presence in and movement through a landscape, but also looks at a full range of methods a minority group may use to subvert that system of spatial control.”¹⁰³ The nervous

landscape of racial segregation may have restricted African American movement in and out of white spaces, but it also created African American socio-cultural places that are distinctive. Through historic preservation, grassroots preservation organizations are attempting, with varying degrees of success, to address the nervous landscape.

In *The Archeology of Inequality* Randall McGuire and Robert Paynter explore the cultural history of America's past through the "perspective of power relationships. They do so through a refinement of power analysis that stresses the interplay between those who use structural asymmetries of resources in exercising power, known as domination, and those who develop social and cultural opposition to this exercise, known as resistance."¹⁰⁴ The push and pull of domination and resistance as they permeate through social spaces gives rise to the larger issues of power within society. McGuire and Paynter's edited work exposes how these power-laden social relationships produce inequalities across lines of race, class, gender and ethnicity.¹⁰⁵ Similar to Delaney and Byrnes, McGuire and Paynter pay close attention to the ways in which "the material world is used in the construction of domination and resistance."¹⁰⁶ Dominance, in its various forms, is often easier to locate in its intention and function than its counterpart resistance.

At times, resistance can take an unconscious form as presented in Leland Ferguson's chapter "Struggling with Pots in Colonial South Carolina." Here, Ferguson points to the material culture of enslaved Africans, particularly African American foodways, as evidence of unconscious resistance to the dominant slave system imposed by white society. Ferguson writes, "the building of an African American culture, different in kind from that of Southern whites, maintained an unconscious resistance to slavery and

the plantation system” through food.¹⁰⁷ Foodways then, brings power relationships and methods of resistance in African American communities into focus. It allows scholars to examine another site of cultural production in families and communities.¹⁰⁸

Power struggles also manifest as intellectual dialogues when various stakeholders take part in the preservation of minority historical sites. In Cheryl J. La Roche and Michael L. Blakey’s “Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground,” the political climate is exposed through the excavation of New York’s African Burial Ground. La Roche and Blakey address the Eurocentric project design and research approaches initially intended for the excavation of the New York City African Burial Ground and the ways in which the African American community seized power over the research and interpretation of the site. La Roche and Blakey write, “the dynamics of the relationship and the shape of the project have been determined to a large extent by the relentless determination of the African American descendant community to exercise control over the handling and disposition of the physical remains and artifacts of their ancestors.”¹⁰⁹ This article demonstrates the ways in which communities, through grassroots organizing and direct action protests, can successfully intercede in determining research approaches to and the interpretation of African American historic sites.

As the stakes rose in the struggle for interpretive power, the site of the burial ground took on multiple layers of meaning, first as a cultural landscape that represents racialized spaces of colonial America and then as an intellectual and physiological space of contested meaning as various stakeholders struggled for creative control of the history of the site.¹¹⁰ La Roche and Blakely write, “The significance of the site, according to the research design, should be understood in relation to the ‘vindicationist’ effort (Schomburg

1929) and the critical intellectual, educational, and political concerns of the African-American community.¹¹¹

Taken together, the literature I assessed for this study fell short of addressing all the concerns of my inquiries. When taken individually, each adds value and salience to my understanding of historic preservation, cultural landscapes, socioeconomics, class and power. However, none comprehensively address the African American experience within historic preservation, or the ways in which historic preservation is utilized to address social justice issues for marginalized communities, or the role of women in the process. There is no clear, linear argument, or proposed methodological toolkit, that addresses both the historical marginalization of African American communities and the necessity for an intervention into current preservation methods. Therefore, my research is not only timely but also necessary to shape the forthcoming preservation discussions regarding the social justice activism of grassroots preservation organizations in marginalized communities. Without this scholarship and the methodological toolkit it provides, those who hover at the margins and feel hopeless in their search for social justice will remain in the shadows.

Chapter Overview

My analysis of each community is laid out extensively in the following chapters. I spend a chapter on each community so as to consolidate my findings chronologically. Though it may seem formulaic, it is not.¹¹² Each chapter offers critical insight into the ways in which community members organize at the grassroots level to develop counter-narratives and push back against institutional marginalization. Each chapter examines the special role that women serve in the journey to establish, preserve and sustain their

communities. An added layer of complexity within this project has been unpacking the various institutional stakeholders that have emerged in light of the preservation efforts led by grassroots activists. These stakeholders, including museums, educational institutions, and corporations, ascribe to competing agendas and often vie for narrative authority of the community's history and preservation agenda.¹¹³ My analysis includes a brief discussion of institutional stakeholders and their role in shaping the preservation agendas of the grassroots organizations in the communities under study.

In order to effectively offer a comparative analysis of each community of study in Chapter Five, each community-focused chapter draws on a similar model. I begin with a brief discussion of the history of each community. I analyze Freedmen's Bureau records, land deeds, census data, voter registration rolls, account books, newspaper articles and material culture artifacts to map the cultural footprint of each community. An analysis of these source materials provides the necessary historical contextualization to examine the extent to which each community has addressed institutional marginalization within the larger socio-political preservation climate of the state. This allows the reader to also contextualize the community's history. Next, I move to the preservation issues I observed while conducting research within the community. I trace, through participant observations, oral history interviews, meeting minute notes, and focus groups, the expressed agendas of LCHP, FSJC, and FTPC the navigation strategies of community preservation organizations positioned on the margins. These observations were compiled in part through participant observation but also focus groups and oral history interviews. Third, I address the preservation work being done by each organization, paying close

attention to the similarities in strategies and methods. Finally, I conclude each chapter with future work that needs to be done.

Ultimately, this project demands we consider what is at stake when we seek to address the intricately woven relationship between preserving the histories of marginalized communities, social justice, and historic preservation. It considers what are the best tools to use when engaging communities that have heretofore been sidelined or forgotten. This involves more than including a community narrative into the archive or offering insurgent narratives to challenge that which already exists as popularly accepted historical narrative. I seek to give an active voice to communities of color that are historically marginalized and whose culture is on the verge of being lost. Overall, I am suggesting a path in which we as scholars can empower communities in whatever ways we can, and support their efforts to intervene in traditional historic preservation practices that also marginalize their histories. We can serve as guideposts, mouthpieces, and invaluable resources to communities seeking to get their message out and prompt change in how we identify, interpret and preserve African American historic sites. Though their lands are being taken through urban renewal, gentrification, and suburban development there is still more work to do for those who endeavor to preserve their own community histories, on their own terms, in their own ways. Documenting the preservationists' efforts in Lakeland, St. John and Freedmen's Town puts faith to work and reminds us that just as faith without works is dead, history without preservation is lost.

Chapter Two: “Our Lovely Town, O Lakeland Town”: African American Place-Making and Preservation in College Park, Maryland

Our Lovely Town, O Lakeland Town

Of Maples, Elms and Oaks.

A quiet town, a peaceful town,

Of Kind and gentle folks.

Our fathers stood with strength

And faith, to make this township stand.

We love this strand of quiet land.

--Shirley Randall Anderson, 1987¹¹⁴

In 1890, amid the racial backdrop of Maryland and just twenty-five years after the end of the Civil War, a small freedom colony emerged along the banks of Lake Artemisia.¹¹⁵ The settlement, nestled inside the city boundaries of College Park in Prince George’s County, was first intended as a resort community for white residents. African American settlement, however, ultimately superseded that of white settlement in Lakeland. Lakeland’s founder, Edwin Newman, advertised the resort style community in the local newspapers, enticing prospective buyers to settle on a lake lots outside of Washington D.C. in the 1870s.¹¹⁶ Never intending African Americans to purchase land and settle, oral testimony asserts white residents set their homes on fire as they fled in the 1890s. This chapter examines the historically African American community of Lakeland, surveying the preservation practices at work in the community and examining the ways in which women shape these efforts. It also explores the collaborative efforts between the Lakeland Community Heritage Project (LCHP) and the University of

Maryland, College Park (UMD). Finally, it details the preservation work that still needs to be done in the community. Though Lakeland still struggles for inclusion on state and national historic registries, I argue the homegrown preservation efforts championed by LCHP serve as a “best practices model” for other community organizations engaging in preservation work from the margins.¹¹⁷

The Foundational History of Lakeland

In this section, I trace the circumstances in which the African American settlement of Lakeland emerged. Prince George’s County, the county in which Lakeland resides, was home to a large population of freemen after the war.¹¹⁸ For example, The census reported 11,510 slaves and 1,138 freed blacks were living in Prince George’s County, Maryland in 1850, 12, 479 slaves and 1,198 free blacks in 1860s, 9,780 colored persons in 1870 and 12, 846 colored persons in 1880. The 1870 broke down the enslaved population even further, to include age groups for men and women who could read and write, as well as how many freed men and women were attending school in 1870. The 1880 census only identified the number of colored and white persons living in the county, with no additional break down of literacy or school attendance. Though the “shadow of slavery”¹¹⁹ lingered over African Americans, the explosion of “free towns” across the nation suggests African Americans were establishing new and independent communities during this period.¹²⁰ The freedom to purchase property was of central importance to many African Americans in the decades after the Civil War.¹²¹ Evidence collected by the census and left by African Americans living in Prince George’s County from the 1860s-1880s provides a clearer picture of the ways in which freedom colonies emerged amid the racialized landscape of the late nineteenth century.¹²²

Thad Sitton and James Conrad write in *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow*,

“Freedmen’s settlements were independent rural communities of African American landowners (and land squatters) that formed in the South in the years after Emancipation. ‘Freedom colonies,’ as blacks sometimes called them, were to a degree anomalies in a post-war South where white power elites rapidly resumed social, economic, and political control and the system of sharecropping came to dominate.”¹²³

The trend was not just occurring in rural areas; African American migration to urban centers created ethnic enclaves within the city limits.¹²⁴ Andrew Wiese notes in *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, “After emancipation, the number and variety of suburban black settlements multiplied. As migration swelled urban communities, developers subdivided peripheral land, selling lots to African Americans, usually in places where blacks had established a foothold.”¹²⁵

The Lakeland community was originally developed by white businessman named Edwin A. Newman in 1890. He hoped to draw white residents to his resort style enclave and invested over \$175,000 in Lakeland. Newman hoped to attract potential buyers by highlighting the proximity of the community to the B & O railroad line and the neighborhood amenities including “a store, post office, railroad stop and a town hall.”¹²⁶ He placed a series of advertisements in the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times* from 1893-1897, marketing the enclave as an “ideal subdivision... adjacent to the Maryland Agricultural College”¹²⁷ with “suburban cottages at one third actual value.”¹²⁸ Notwithstanding, the community failed to draw many white buyers, and those who did purchase land during the early years of Lakeland’s development did not build homes on their lots.¹²⁹

Sparsely populated and with few prospective white buyers, the transition of Newman’s development into an African American enclave occurred gradually between

1900-1910. The ability to own property was a point of pride for African Americans settling in Lakeland. Oral history testimony documented the earliest African American buyers as second generation freedmen who rented lots in Lakeland as early as 1900. Deed research confirms that John C. Johnson “was the first African American homeowner in Lakeland in 1901.”¹³⁰ The presence of African American tenants and the likelihood of more to follow was enough for the remaining white residences of Lakeland to move. In a last declaration of racial repulsion, two of the best houses in the community, still at that time owned by whites, mysteriously burned to the ground in April 1900.¹³¹ Local newspapers covering the story cited “suspected arson” and noted the homes were insured.¹³² Oral history testimony from Lakeland residents suggests the two homes “may have been intentionally burned by people who would rather see the insurance money collected than have homes rented to African Americans.”¹³³ This is not an unlikely reaction from white residents; the last half of the 19th and early decades of the twentieth century is what historians have called the “nadir of American race relations.”¹³⁴

By 1907 Newman’s all white suburb was a dream long past. Perhaps it was the inability of Edwin A. Newman to coax white settlement into the resort style community that ultimately led to the community becoming a predominantly African American settlement. White property owners in Lakeland, seeing the potential to turn a profit on their loss, began marketing to the emerging African American middle class. One such ad placed in *The Washington Times* read, “For sale—on easy terms, between Lakeland and College Park, a fine 8-room house. Suitable for a colored family of means.”¹³⁵ Lakeland was situated on the B&O railroad lines and became prime real estate for African Americans looking for suburban living. The cheap and fertile land suitable for sustenance

farming, and the close proximity to employment (within walking distance to University of Maryland and a trolley ride from Washington D.C.) brought even more African Americans to the settlement. As the first decade of the 20th century drew to a close Lakeland had transitioned from a predominately white resort style suburban community to an up and coming African American suburb.

During the early years of Lakeland's founding African American residents formed strong bonds of community and belonging. Their efforts culminated in the opening of two churches and a school. Research conducted by the LCHP illustrates the communal atmosphere during these early years. "Meetings for "song and praise" in individuals' homes led to the establishment of two church congregations: First Baptist Church, founded in 1891, and Embury African Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in 1903. Lakelanders opened their community's first school in 1903."¹³⁶ By 1910 three prominent Lakeland families, the Johnsons, the Brooks,¹³⁷ and the Grays had established homesteads. Several of the families' descendants still reside in Lakeland.

This section explored the cultural landscape of Lakeland in College Park, Maryland from 1870-1910 and summarized the socio-economic realities of Lakeland's African American roots. I traced the community's development from predominantly white, resort style community to an African American enclave in College Park, Maryland. I located the early sites of cultural production in Lakeland, namely the two churches and schoolhouse, and identified the prominent families who established homesteads in early Lakeland. In the following section, I document the preservation efforts of Lakeland's grassroots organization in order to tease out the ways in which heritage preservation takes place.

Grassroots Preservation in Lakeland

Historic preservation at the grassroots level consists of citizens from various backgrounds combining various types of resources and expertise to manage historic properties and heritage sites. These groups meet in community centers, libraries, and living rooms to strategize about best methods for preserving community and pursuing social justice through historic preservation. Once formed, many grassroots organizations apply for 501(c)3 status and operate as a nonprofit community group advocating for preservation, education and visibility in the public sphere. Though there many circumstances differ, the goals of these types of organizations are strikingly similar; to preserve what is left of their historic community and educate the public about their heritage. In this section, I examine the Lakeland Community Heritage Project (LCHP), in order to determine how preservation takes shape in marginalized African American communities. I address the ways in which the founding narrative and historic sites of significance have been memorialized within the community.

In 2007, dedicated members of the Lakeland community formed the LCHP, an all-volunteer organization that took on the mission of uncovering, retrieving and piecing together Lakeland's history. The group consisted of 3rd and 4th generation Lakelanders, volunteers from the neighboring Berwyn Heights neighborhood and a few members of the College Park city council. The mission, according to their organization,

Lakeland Community Heritage Project's mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret the heritage and history of those African Americans who created, lived in, and/or had association with the Lakeland community of Prince George's County, Maryland from the late 19th century to the present.¹³⁸

The toolkit that LCHP developed aligns with the mission, and utilizes various preservation methods to extract information about the community from a range of

historical records.¹³⁹ Perhaps most importantly, many of the participants in the initial LCHP organization acquired and honed their research skills while serving as family historians. Oral history testimonies, personal photographs, church and school records, deed research, historical map research, and census data were also key to achieving LCHP's mission.¹⁴⁰ As will be addressed later in the chapter, the manner in which amateur historians shape historical narratives within and outside the family became a central component of the methodological framework of LCHP's toolkit.

I once heard their preservation style described as family historians "save heritage through hobby."¹⁴¹ In working with LCHP during those early years, I identified the subtleties of family historian's influence, perhaps because I first witnessed the methods of my grandmother (our family historian) as a young child. My grandmother, Geraldine Douglass, has lived as a housewife in the deep woods of Texas for nearly thirty-two years. She filled much of her free time by chronicling her life via tape recorder.¹⁴² Often she would retreat to her private corner of the house and record stories about her life. She would tell me she was writing her book, *The Token Few*. I can remember being enamored with her process and wanted to be just like her; a collector of history. She is very much still interested in the history of all things addressing the African American experience, and I will often visit and find her reading old copies of *Essence* magazines and clipping newspapers. She is, in so many ways, the keeper of our family narrative.

As a child, there was no way of knowing she was actually participating in a form of grassroots preservation at the family site. To me she was just talking to herself on tape. Looking back through a new lens, however, I realize her project was not only a personal journey of discovery, but also significant in helping me understand the nuances of

preservation within grassroots historic preservation efforts led by women in African American communities. I connect this story to LCHP's narrative because it illustrates how the amateur family historian can shape historic preservation in their communities as well as experience a personal journey of exploration. Many family members have inherited the title of family historian, not because they are "classically trained" historians or are educated in archival studies, methods and theory. This section explores the ways in which family historians in Lakeland, particularly those involved with the LCHP authored apictorial history book, sustained *community* history by first re-engaging with their own *family* histories. I argue these amateur family historians insure the survival of community history through various methods of grassroots preservation, most notably by the maintenance of family archives.

In theory, a community archive is no different than the family trunks, passed down recipes, scrapbooks or recorded memories in our home today. Both contain narratives that represent the continuity of family and community identities over time and space. Both represent the conscious collection and preservation of objects deemed significant enough to be included in these narratives. In LCHP's case, the work of family historians and community volunteers culminated in the Lakeland heritage weekend (celebrated annually on the second or third weekend of September) and the publication of a community heritage book entitled *Lakeland; African Americans in College Park*. In the introduction, the organic development of the preservation organization is spelled out;

This book began as a conversation among longtime Lakeland residents. They reflected upon times gone by and feared the story of their community with its lessons of faith, fortitude and achievement was being quickly lost. They know that new residents had no idea Lakeland was a historic African American community with a noble past. Its story had never been documented...Dozens of volunteers, including family members, former class mates, friends and

neighbors sat together around tables piled high with photo albums, property maps, and yearbooks, exchanging stories about their loves and experiences in Lakeland. Although additional information was gathered from historic documents, the heart and soul of this book are the images and recollections shared during those first two Lakeland heritage weekends.¹⁴³

This introduction alludes to the many family historians that combined their resources in order to make the pictorial history possible. Among them, Violetta Sharpes Jones, Maxine Gross and Pearl Lee, among many others, worked tirelessly to complete the book and today remain active in the organization. These family historians turned community griots are among the many Lakealanders who have taken up the task of piecing together the community's history. LCHP's efforts follow a similar trajectory to that which Dolores Hayden discusses in *The Power of Place*.¹⁴⁴ Across the country, concerned citizens in marginalized communities form grassroots preservation groups to fight against threats of erasure from private nonprofit agencies and public agencies. Their agendas of these local preservationists, Hayden asserts, include actively shaping the public narrative of their heritage and historic sites by "putting forward their own projects to represent their communities' history and tell their own stories in public space."¹⁴⁵ In working with LCHP, I chronicled the ways in which they approached the reconstruction of Lakeland's narrative. In the following sections, I analyze the utility of LCHP's strategies for achieving the organization's mission.

Archiving the Oral History of Lakelanders

For preservation organizations in their infancy, an early step to preserving community history *must* include an oral history component and strategy to create a local archive. For Lakealanders, oral history as a tool for recovering the forgotten stories of their community was crucial to their preservation initiatives. Scholars have long debated the

utility and reliability of oral history research. Critics have pointed out that memory is fickle, scattered, and at times fabricated for the benefit of the informant. They have cited the inherent limitations of oral history in that the researcher can only reach as far back as the informants memory will take them. Despite its shortcomings as a research method, oral history's value far exceeds its disadvantages.

Oral history was the bracket that bridged the divide between the past and the present. Not only was Lakeland excluded in the local and state archives (as stated by LCHP in their book's introduction, "Its story had never been documented") but the built environment of Lakeland was fractured by urban renewal in early 1970s to the mid-1980s, displacing many Lakelanders decades before LCHP was even founded. Old age, failing health, and disinterest of former and present residents in reliving the past were also issues that LCHP had to navigate. When LCHP started their oral history project, decades of internal politics influenced who participated and what stories they shared. For example, many of the elders within the community were hesitant to speak on the record about their experiences during the Jim Crow era.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the wealth of knowledge held by community elders who did participate provided a rich source of knowledge that formed the foundation of LCHP's preservation story. Some of the informants included in the project were 5th and 6th generation Lakelanders, and their testimonies included vivid stories of Lakeland's early days. When the oral history testimonies were coupled with images, artifacts, voter registration records, deed and census records, newspaper articles, church records and school reports, LCHP was able to create a community archive that provided a clearer understanding of the community's early dynamic history. When researching communities

whose histories exist outside of traditional written sources, oral history becomes the go-to method for collecting historical evidence. The advantage of utilizing oral history research is twofold; first, forgotten histories are recovered and preserved for future generations through a medium that has deep roots in the African diaspora; and second, oral history helps to reinforce shared community identities and values.

As a method of historical research, oral history is symbolic of a centuries old African tradition. In the African diaspora, the *griot* transmitted the cultural memories of the community through storytelling.¹⁴⁷ Their status in society was one of prestige and honor. By becoming the storyteller, the informant's (or griots) in LCHP's oral history project were partaking in a form of cultural production that has deep roots in African traditions. Though the impulse within academe is to formalize processes of data collection, oral history does not necessarily have to be formulaic to be effective. Oral history can be an organic process that involves the interviewer and interviewee in dialogue with one another.¹⁴⁸ By engaging in a discussion rather than the more rigid question and answer format employed by trained oral historians, LCHP volunteers were able to extract information from their informants in a non-threatening and unbiased way.¹⁴⁹ In the early stages of LCHP's efforts, collecting oral histories helped to break through some of the intrapolitical barriers within the community and was foundational in establishing the community archive.

Oral histories included as part of community heritage projects also reinforce shared identities and values. The purpose of LCHP's oral history project was to document their own experiences in their own voices and establish a community archive. The multiple voices represented in LCHP's oral history project symbolize a diverse mosaic of

experiences that each contribute to the shared community identity of Lakeland. Many informants were eager to share the histories of their families' connection to Lakeland. At the time the project commenced there were 5th and 6th generation Lakelanders still living in the area. Those who could trace their family lineage back to Lakeland's founding tended to be very active in the LCHP oral history project, either as an informant or as an interviewer.¹⁵⁰ Some Lakelanders however, shied away from the project all together.¹⁵¹ This mosaic of experiences is not without its dark spots and shadows. The painful memories that plagued the community vis-à-vis segregation, marginalization, and the Lakeland Urban Renewal Plan sent sharp reminders of social injustices experienced throughout the community's history. My analysis suggests LCHP sought to include social justice in the interpretation of their oral history interviews, even though this was not directly stated or implied during the interviews. If the underpinning agenda was to tell the story of Lakeland's community history, the organization had to face some troubling realities emerging out of the Jim Crow Era.

Two influential scholarly works, *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South* and *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South*, helped me appreciate the significance of LCHP's oral history project in unpacking the complexity of the African American experience during the Jim Crow era.¹⁵² The edited volume *Remembering Jim Crow* by William H. Chafe, Raymond Gavins, and Robert Korstad uses data collected by Duke University for their Behind the Veil research project to "gain access to the experiences and perspectives of ordinary men and women who otherwise would not be represented in the historical record."¹⁵³ The introduction states,

The Behind the Veil Project began with two frames of reference: first, the belief that, as with the civil rights era, recovering the voices of average citizens provided the best means of exploring the commonalities and difference of the black experience during the Jim Crow period; second, the conviction that behind the two-dimensional story of oppression and submission there existed a richer, deeper and more compelling reality that an investigation of the institutions, family and community patterns, spiritual life and daily experience of black Americans in diverse southern communities would reveal.¹⁵⁴

Similar to the research conducted by LCHP, the necessity of oral history testimony to fill in the gaps of historical narratives left by insufficient written documents and institutional records was imperative to the Behind the Veil project.¹⁵⁵ *Remembering Jim Crow* demonstrates the power in oral history testimony and the utility of such archival collections for facilitating discussions concerning the lost histories of African Americans during the era of Jim Crow.

Comparable to *Remembering Jim Crow*, Ann Valk and Leslie Brown's *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South* utilizes the same Behind the Veil research project archive to examine the ways in which African Americans experienced Jim Crow across ten southern states. Focusing specifically on the experiences of female informants, these interviewees "articulate a strong womanist consciousness" that offer researchers a "feminist understanding of their worlds."¹⁵⁶ Though the informants included in the volume were born between 1900 and 1947, their collective memories span beyond their ages. "Our interviewees," Valk and Brown write, "inherited the memories of slavery and hope of freedom directly from freed people, their great grandparents and grandparents, and from their parents. Freedom promised autonomy and that promise mattered. And in this vein, as historical actors, these narrators shouldered the cause of racial destiny."¹⁵⁷

Each of these edited volumes demonstrates the power inherent within oral history research and the archival creation model. In both volumes, the informants reminisce about the strong bonds of belonging and sense of pride that existed within their communities. In some instances, it seems that the process of remembering troubled histories and reclaiming the strength of past generations to survive through Jim Crow subsequently rekindled a sense of belonging within these communities. In this sense, the oral histories collected from informants in Lakeland parallel the experiences of informants included in *Remembering Jim Crow* and *Living with Jim Crow*.¹⁵⁸

Personal Photograph Collections in Lakeland

The second instrument in LCHP's preservation toolkit is the compilation of personal photograph collections. By creating a community archive, marginalized community grassroots preservation organizations can utilize photographs from personal collections and oral history testimonies as tools for constructing restorative historical narratives. This social justice initiative utilizes local resources (knowledge held in the repertoire and in personal archives) to shape the community narrative in the public sphere. Just as oral history uncovers the community history embedded in family histories, photographs enliven the archive by establishing visual narratives. For LCHP, the images tell the story of Lakeland's history from the perspective of the families that lived and contributed to it. The images included in the community archive were selected through a process which involved ascribing meaning to each image, and placing the image (and the meaning it represents) within larger context in the community narrative. I argue that the images included in LCHP's archive visually construct the community's historical narrative within the public sphere.

In nearly every home I visited while conducting research in Lakeland, there were black and white photographs of elderly family members. Sometimes these images were framed and proudly exhibited in the makeshift photograph galleries that lined stairways and corridors. Other times they were tucked into the edge of other framed pictures or stacked in photo albums on coffee tables and bookshelves. Our conversations generally started the same way; I would say “*what a wonderful picture. May I ask who this is?*” and then a detailed discussion would follow that usually included an interesting fact or funny antidote about the individual pictured. I would listen attentively as the story unfolded, trying to imagine the manner in which this story was told to my storyteller. Were they there to bear witness? Was this a story that they overheard elders tell during their childhood? Was this a well-known old family fable?¹⁵⁹

I am chiefly concerned with the selection process of the photographs included in the initial community archive as well as the smaller percentage of images that ultimately made it into *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park*. Subtle constructions of power and knowledge production are inherent in the creation of the archive itself. As stated earlier in the chapter, “Dozens of volunteers, including family members, former classmates, friends and neighbors sat together around tables piled high with photo albums, property maps, and yearbooks, exchanging stories about their loves and experiences in Lakeland.”¹⁶⁰ Who was around the table when these planning workshops were taking place? What archives did *they* draw from to build their own? In what ways do these images also tell a counter-narrative about Lakeland?¹⁶¹ I am reminded of the old adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” in thinking through these questions and the centrality of images as artifact for historic preservation. When aligned within the archive,

photographs and oral histories build meaning at the site of community identity construction. LCHP mapped these identities onto the cultural and political landscapes across Lakeland's history in an effort to produce a counter narrative to histories that posit African American communities as lacking stability and homogeneously lower class.

The scholarship concerning photographic collections, their relationship to memories, and their place in the archive is extensive. It is beneficial now, to turn to a discussion of material culture, particularly photographs, and the ways in which they shape the narratives of the storytellers, and provide a glimpse into the everyday lives of the Lakeland community. As objects, pictures speak from and for the past. They are reproductions of a moment in space and time that are literally *captured* so as to be held in the absolute suspension of "the past." Think briefly of all the places and events that we document through the production of photographs; what signifiers are included (subtly or overtly) within photographs that point us to the *multiple pasts* that are captured within each photo? How are subtle nuances of power, privilege, race, class, and gender encoded in pictures and in what ways could uncovering these multiple discourses within photographs point scholars to the multiple pasts existing within each image?

The images included in the LCHP archive carry with them meanings which are privately and publicly constructed. Once placed in the LCHP archive, they become part of a larger discursive conversation. Issues of power, domination, resistance and subversion are ever present, despite how subtle their imprints seem to be.¹⁶² Through inclusion in the community archive the life of the image extends, but so does, the breadth of meanings assigned to them. A re-reading of the images included in LCHP's archive, particularly those included in *Lakeland, African Americans in College Park*, point us to issues of

class, gender, race, dominant narratives, and subversive resistance. Images circulate through time and space, gaining cultural meaning as they move further from the time period of their origins.

To further demonstrate images' utility in telling stories, let us turn to *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park* to access the stories the images tell. The cover image of *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park* is shown below (Figure 2.1).¹⁶³

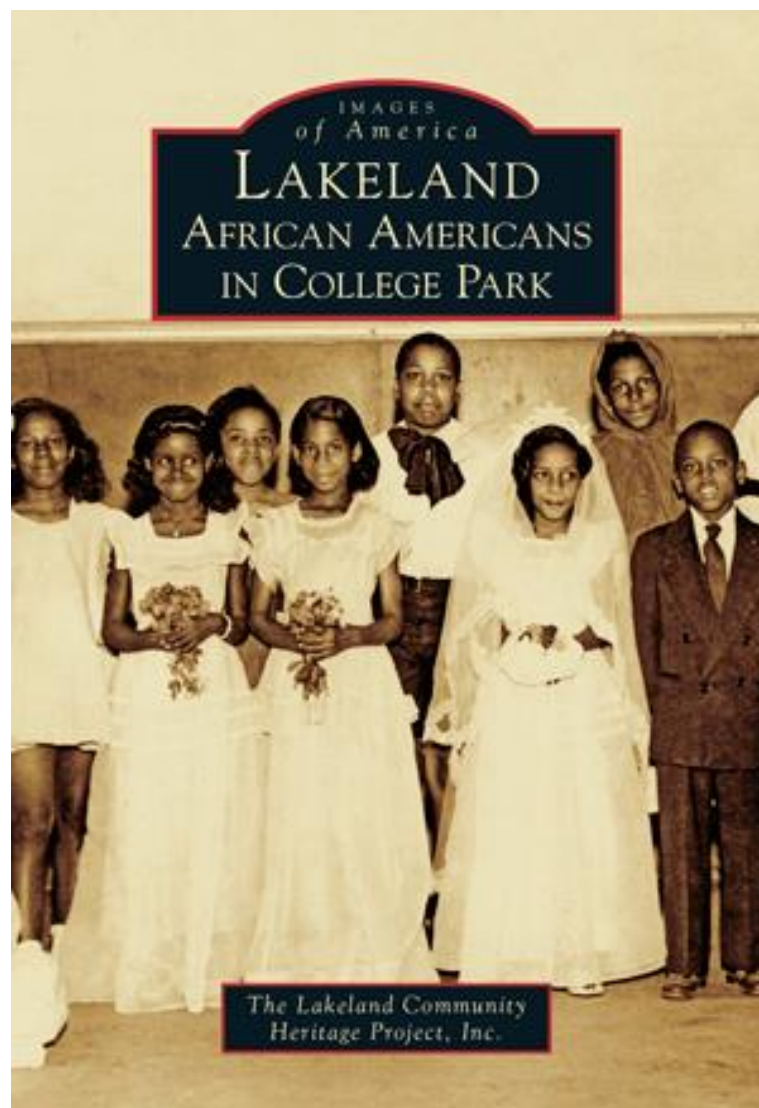


Figure 2.1: Front Cover, *Lakeland Elementary students posing for a picture after a school play in 1953.* Photo courtesy of Arcadia Publishing website.

The cover image (Fig. 2.1) is also included on page twenty-seven of the book, where the caption reads,

Lakeland schools supplemented academic activities with variety shows that helped children develop performance skills and confidence in public speaking. In 1953, students at Lakeland elementary performed a Tom Thumb Wedding, inspired by the song ‘The Wedding of the Painted Doll, from the 1929 film *The Broadway Melody*. The school’s presentation included Lakeland boys and girls, as well as those who attending the school from other communities along U.S. Route 1. (courtesy of Jean Gray Matthews)¹⁶⁴

It is not evident why LCHP chose this image over the others included in the book to adorn the cover. In my own experience working with Arcadia publishing, the cover image must meet certain dimensions and tell a particular aspect of the story included in the pictorial history. The 1953 image illustrates the continued growth and development of the communities (exemplified through the children pictured) as well as points to the thriving community school that Lakelanders attended while operating under a still segregated school system in Prince George’s County. LCHP sought to highlight the educational legacy of the community in Chapter Two, entitled “The Key to the Dream” focuses on education in Lakeland. Many of the images included focus on Lakeland’s educational institutions during segregation, and draw the reader’s attention to the strong tradition of educating the youth of the community.

The cover image (Fig. 2.1) alludes to the pre-1954 institutionalization of education in Lakeland. Following its transition to an African American enclave in the 1890s, Lakeland had operated almost entirely as a self-contained community. In addition to the two churches, the school was one of the crown jewels in Lakeland. The one room schoolhouse that eventually became John C. Johnson elementary served the children of Lakelanders but also absorbed other children from surrounding African American communities in Prince George’s County.¹⁶⁵ With the assistance of the Julius Rosenwald

Fund, the one room schoolhouse was replaced with a two room structure in 1925.¹⁶⁶

Lakeland High School opened in 1928, and the two schools serviced Lakeland and the surrounding African American communities until 1950, when Lakeland's senior high students moved to Fairmont Heights (the new African American high school in Prince George's County) and Lakeland elementary and junior high students transitioned to Lakeland High School's old building. When placed within the context of Lakeland's history, this layer of the image denotes the complicated politics of continuing school segregation.¹⁶⁷

The children captured in the image were, perhaps, blissfully unaware of the political discourses regarding integration. Like most children, their days were filled with games and shared snacks, secrets at recess and extracurricular activities. The image does not allude to a separate and unequal experience for the children, but rather a categorically typical elementary school ritual; participation in the school play. What is equally telling about this photograph is this group of elementary age students were some of the last in the community to experience Lakeland as a segregated, self-contained community.¹⁶⁸ On paper, the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ended the era of Jim Crow segregation laws in public institutions,¹⁶⁹ but in reality, the efforts to end segregation in public education began long before 1954, and wasn't fully realized until long after. In Prince George's County, the Superintendent sent an office bulletin just days after segregation was overturned that explained he "expects to operate schools on the same basis as in previous years."¹⁷⁰ Though segregation shaped the built environment and cultural landscapes during this period, the Lakeland community nonetheless created sustainable educational institutions for their children. The light and airy tone of the image

suggests that the pre-1954 schools in Lakeland were a source of pride for Lakelanders. When contrasting this image with those included in Chapter Eight, “A Dream Denied,” we see a very different aspect of Lakeland’s history.

“A Dream Denied,” offers a pictorial history of Lakeland during urban renewal. Urban renewal and gentrification are processes which effected largely marginalized working class communities, demolished social institutions, dislocated residents and disrupted many aspects of the cultural fabric. Even forty years after its groundbreaking, the Lakeland Urban Renewal Plan, had lasting and traumatic effects on Lakelanders.¹⁷¹ As early as 1961, the community was identified in city planning documents as “The Lakeland Problem,” noting the, “‘substandard’ state of ‘housing, drainage and general environmental conditions.’”¹⁷² The “substandard drainage and general environmental conditions” noted in these documents do little to address the reasons why Lakeland’s infrastructure was substandard; decades of exclusion from municipal services including garbage collection, street lighting and paved roads left Lakelanders to fend for themselves. Community members took the reins of developing systems of trash collection, flood prevention and even instituted a neighborhood watch through their Lakeland Civic Association. All of these community measures emerged as a result of being denied services from the City of College Park.¹⁷³ Ironically, the very services the city denied to Lakeland were factors in the 1961 decision by the College Park City Council and Mayor to seek “urban renewal power” from the State of Maryland and the Federal government. Once granted, it allowed the city to “obtain funding and planning expertise for relieving public or private conditions contributing or causing these substandard environmental conditions.”¹⁷⁴ Over the course of the next fifteen years the

City of College Park sought and secured funding through state and federal resource pools specifically earmarked for urban renewal.¹⁷⁵ In doing so, the city and the state played a pivotal role in transforming the built environment of Lakeland, basing the “need” for urban renewal in the community on the out-of-date infrastructure. This despite the fact that it was the city and the state that historically denied resources to update the infrastructure in the Lakeland community.

Urban renewal dramatically changed the physical landscape of Lakeland. It left psychological scars on those who experienced firsthand the destruction of their community in the name of “progress.” The twenty-three images included in Chapter Eight only *begin* to shed light on the effects of urban renewal. Much of the chapter lays out the location of the demolished buildings by including an image of erected structure on its original site. The buildings pictured following this format are Black’s store, Mack’s store, the Elks Lodge, Lakeland’s Hall, Lakeland Tavern, and eleven single family home residences.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps the most haunting set of images in the chapter illustrate Lakeland in transition during urban renewal (Figure 2.2). The first image depicts the signage marking the renewal area (east of the railroad tracks). This area, known in Lakeland as the East side, was demolished and replaced with the DC Metro Green Line extension, a public park and the expansion of Lake Artemisia.¹⁷⁷



In 1961, College Park officials recognized the need to improve and renovate some of Lakeland's homes, many of which had been damaged by the frequent flooding. To carry out the improvements, city officials adopted an urban renewal plan in 1970. It mandated redevelopment of Lakeland's eastern and western sections, about two-thirds of the community. Residents of the affected areas vacated their homes in the mid-1970s. They were compensated for the value of their homes and promised an opportunity to return to new housing units when construction was completed. The project was expected to take a few years. However, it took much longer because problems plagued the project, thanks to changes in regulations and policies within the federal government resulting in numerous delays. Over time, economic forces and other issues produced vast changes in the redevelopment plan. The "Urban Renewal" notice shown above and the ruins of homes, such as those along a section of Lakeland Road (pictured below), blighted the community for more than five years. (Both courtesy of the Gross family.)



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Figure 2.2: Effects of urban renewal in community as documented in *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park*. Photo Courtesy of lakealndchp.org.

Lakeland's own Dr. Joanne Braxton documented the hegemonic discourses of urban renewal in Lakeland and grassroots resistance measures taken up by Billy Weems in In her article "Symbolic Geographies and Psychic Landscapes: Hegemonic discourses of Urban Renewal in the case for Billy Weems v. the City of College Park, Maryland." Braxton describes the vibrancy of Lakeland before urban renewal, stating, "Lakeland, with its rural landscape, the timeless stream behind my childhood home on Richmond Avenue filled with fish, the Lakeland Elementary and Junior High School, our three churches, the two black stores that served the everyday needs and formed part of the basis of our economy, the backyards filled with roses, peonies, and four-o'clocks, the large subsistence gardens which fed families year-round, and the numbers game, always illegal and subsequently usurped by the state lottery."¹⁷⁸ The image Braxton paints with her words in "Symbolic Geographies and Psychic Landscapes" stands in stark comparison to the sites of trauma exemplified in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 is a haunting reminder of The Lakeland Urban Renewal Plan. The trees that remain outline the property. The stairs to nowhere and empty lot behind them suggest a family home once stood there, another historic home site full of love and laughter—lost to the bulldozer of urban renewal in Lakeland. The only identifier for this home is a reference to its location included in the caption that reads, "...the ruins of homes, such as those along a section of Lakeland Road (pictured below), blighted the community for more than five years."¹⁷⁹ These images were likely the painstaking reality for homegrown activist Billy Weems. Arguably, the resistance efforts led by Weems represent some of the earliest grassroots initiatives to combat or urban renewal in Lakeland. Using pamphlets written on his personal typewriter and distributed door to

door throughout the community, Weems staged a one man protest against redevelopment in Lakeland. Braxton includes some of Weems' writings in her article in order to punctuate the activism he championed.¹⁸⁰ Weems issued a call to action to fellow Lakelanders stating, "I smell a stink in the air. Really, its too peaceful to be so stinky. "Alls well that ends well. I know the end is not in sight. We had better prepare ourselves. Because the forces are regrouping for another assault. We have to be prepared for anything. The end is just another beginning."¹⁸¹ In a moment of prophetic clarity, Weems points us to the reality of urban renewal that Braxton captures so poetically in her article; "This was war."¹⁸² The everyday battles that grassroots activists face in the trenches of preservation are entrenched with wartime rhetoric—tactical assault, counter-moves, regroup and strategize, rally the troops—all point to ways in which urban renewal is perceived as a type of domestic war waged against the city's most vulnerable.

War brings out the strangest bedfellows and reveals the most dangerous enemies in our midst. Weems directs us to the intrapolitics occurring in the Lakeland community as urban renewal gained traction. He writes in *From "Truth or Deceit* on April 8, 1969, "The question I want answered is. 'Why is it too late?' one leader says 'I could have sold you down the drain a long time ago.' *Did he?* I used to think there was hope for us. 'Keep the Faith' simply means *BELIEVE*. 'WE SHALL OVERCOME' means *we are looking you right in the eye we can see Truth or Deceit.*' Pray tell me what [sic] you see when you look into a mirror."¹⁸³ This excerpt reveals the complicated politics of urban renewal in marginalized communities and suggests that resistance to save a community can also be a marginalized endeavor.

As part of Maryland's urban renewal plan and coupled with the construction of the Green Line Metro extension, the east side of Lakeland was destroyed. The urban renewal plan displaced several families, as turn of the century homes were condemned and torn down to make room for public recreation space. Lake Artemesia was expanded and public hiking trails paved. Public housing developments sprang up on the west side of Lakeland while the central section struggled to retain the community's homogenous culture. Community members moved away and passed away, the old guard of Lakeland turned 80, and as time passed the vibrancy of Lakeland's history dulled under the urban development surrounding it. These painful memories shaped the experiences of Lakelanders for three generations, and the emotion is palpable in hearing the oral histories of community members.¹⁸⁴

What remains in Lakeland today are the two churches, Lakeland High School (now repurposed as a Brazilian-Washington Seven Day Adventist Church) and a collection of single family homes clustered in central Lakeland. By utilizing local resources, particularly oral history testimony and personal photograph collections, LCHP was able to reconstruct aspects of Lakeland's historical narratives to build a community archive. Through the archive, LCHP created a community dialogue about the Lakeland's history and parlayed their efforts into public history events such as walking tours and heritage weekend celebrations with much success. In the next section, I will examine another LCHP initiative, place-making processes and historical markers in Lakeland.

Historical Markers and Place-Making in Lakeland

For many African Americans, Lakeland is “home.” Homes are spaces in which families and communities are safely guarded.¹⁸⁵ When examining the ways in which social justice is pursued through historic preservation, a clear framework of the place-making processes in Lakeland is useful. Externally, white control of public spaces created a cultural landscape of exclusion through a series of domination strategies and containment. This boundary, best known as segregation, was enforced through laws, violence and terror. Jim Crow laws affected the ways marginalized groups lived, worked and played. Railroads and streetcars required, separate cars for African Americans, African American children attended separate schools, and miscegenation was vigorously prosecuted.¹⁸⁶ Segregation extended into the private spaces of the African American community and contributed to the place-making process.¹⁸⁷ African-American communities operated with their own set of internal boundaries that demarcated spaces based on intersections of gender, class and belonging. This second boundary, perpetuated through socialization, defined African American spaces through social and cultural place-making. For example, in Lakeland, there were sites of community specifically catering to the male and female populations (the barber shop and beauty shop respectively) and also spaces in which children were not allowed (the pool hall). There were sites of underground economy activity (“running the numbers” or “the pre-lottery” as informants discuss in oral testimonies) as well as community spaces specifically intended to build communal bonds (the churches, school and as Braxton points out in her article, “the cut). All of these spaces existed in part because of the laws that prohibited black and white socialization.

Before I came to Lakeland, the community members shared a group identity that reflected the communal experience of living in a historically African American and self-contained community. LHCP attempted to identify and conceptually frame the group consciousness of Lakelanders through their archival collection. Similar to the other communities included in the study, the grassroots preservation organizations began with a preconditioned framing of place that included a discussion of both the exterior and interior boundaries of the community. The marginalization the founding generation experienced was actively discussed amongst the members of the preservation group. Similarly, the vibrancy, strong sense of belonging, and self-sufficiency of the community were equally stressed.¹⁸⁸

In Lakeland, LCHP was instrumental in producing restorative history projects in the community and around Prince George's County. The exhibit, *A View from the Lakes*, was created using images and memorabilia from the community's archive. LCHP worked with M-NCPPC (The Maryland-National Parks and Planning Commission) to curate the exhibition for the Montpelier Cultural Arts Center in Laurel, Maryland, in February 2009.¹⁸⁹¹⁹⁰ Another outgrowth of the archive is the LCHP sponsored Heritage Weekend. Since 2007, Lakeland celebrates its history every September with a series of events including picnics, genealogy workshops, basketball tournaments, pageants, parades, pot lucks and joint church services. In recent years, a late August a Heritage Beach Day was added to the events calendar to pay homage to the tradition of Maryland African Americans visiting Carr's and Sparrows Beach on the shores of the Chesapeake during segregation.¹⁹¹¹⁹² All of these initiatives reflect LCHP's place-making efforts within the community. In this section, I am chiefly concerned with the site in which community

place-making meets local and state discourses of historic preservation—the historic designation marker.

In many ways, the historic designation marker solidifies the significance argument of the site, event or individual it represents. Organizations can apply for and receive historic designation for sites or individuals of significances through the county, city, state or national preservation agencies. Once the site gains designation, signage is commissioned (usually at the organization's expense), and the site is officially part of the public history discourse. Many heritage organizations attempt but never gain recognition from local and state preservation agencies. The application requires months of research and, generally speaking, oral history and personal photographs are not enough to successfully prove a site's significance.¹⁹³ It is the process of tying the histories of the site to the larger county and state narratives through primary sources such as maps, deeds and census records that tends to strengthen the application. By seeking historic designation from local and state agencies, communities on the margins can begin the process of restorative social justice through historic preservation. Before examining the community created historic designation markers, it is imperative to contextualize the Lakelanders' efforts to secure designation from local and state preservation agencies. I argue, one strategy employed by the grassroots organizations of study includes addressing social injustices experienced by community members throughout the history of their residency.

To understand the ways in which social justice issues were mapped onto prospective designation sites in marginalized African American communities, I examined the rhetoric of the historic site inventory and marker applications for each community of study. Across their applications, each included a discussion of social institutions like

churches and schools, and how they provided a place of refuge and resurgence for community members.¹⁹⁴ The applications made reference to private homes, general stores and barber shops that served as additional sites of strengthening community heritage.¹⁹⁵ Through the construction of the community's historical narrative and the historical marker application, one can glean the complexity of preservation work in marginalized communities. Perhaps more importantly, these groups construct a historical narrative that situated the community not on the margins but at the center. In Lakeland, LCHP sought to include a social justice framework in the significance argument of their marker application. The interpretation of the site included an underpinning agenda to tell the story of the Lakeland by identifying the key social institutions in the community since its founding.

Preservation Agencies in Maryland and Lakeland's Historical Designation Applications

Historic Preservation in Maryland is a contentious politicized arena in which multiple governmental agencies and private stakeholders interact. The relevancy, available resources and breadth of influence each entity holds creates a fluid cultural economy of preservation at the local, state and national levels. I will briefly explain the positionality and breadth of influence of three Maryland historic property registries before moving into a discussion of the ways in which Lakeland's origin narratives and prominent social institutions are situated in public discourses. The first registry list, the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (MIHP), is compiled by the Maryland Historic Trust. Their website states,

To date, the MIHP is comprised of nearly 90,000 resources, composed of archaeological sites, building, structures, objects and survey districts. A Maryland Inventory form provides a description of historic resource and discusses its history, but the MIHP is not a regulatory instrument, and the determination of a resource's historic significance is not a requirement for

inclusion. Maryland State law provides elsewhere for mechanisms – separate from the MIHP – giving both the State and local jurisdictions the authority to regulate appropriately designated historic resources. The Maryland Inventory should not be confused with the National Register of Historic Places, the Maryland Register of Historic Properties, or local lists of locally designated historic resources, although resources listed in all of the above categories are included in the Maryland Inventory.¹⁹⁶

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Places survey database is somewhat misleading, and could easily be mistaken as the official registry list to a novice researcher. In order to reveal the gaps in the state sanctioned historical narratives regarding African American experiences in Maryland, one would need to cross reference the list of properties *across* the registries. Though the MIHP website does state clearly it is “not a regulatory instrument,” it also does not distinguish between which properties are solely included on the National or MHT registers and which are simply included on the MIHP register. The Lakeland community, John C. Johnson Elementary School and the Lakeland Community High School are all included in this registry.¹⁹⁷

The second registry is maintained by the Maryland National Capital Parks and Recreation Commission (M-NCPPC).¹⁹⁸ Founded in 1927, M-NCPPC is a bi-county organization serving Montgomery and Prince George’s County to help “forward-looking community leaders who saw the need to plan for orderly development and protection of the natural resources in the two suburban counties bordering the District of Columbia.”¹⁹⁹ The historic preservation program works collaboratively with the Planning Board and the Historic Preservation Commission to identify, Under “Inventory Additions” in the June 2010 “Approved Historic Sites and Districts Plan,” Lakeland High School (66-014)²⁰⁰ is listed (Figure 2.3).²⁰¹ According to this plan, a property that meets the criteria for historical, cultural, archeological and/or architectural significance must possess one or a combination of any eight identifiers as listed in Figure 2.4. The historic

Lakeland Community High School, included in Figures 2.5 & 2.6 met the 1a, 1d, 2a, 2e identifiers.²⁰² In both the inventory addition list and the oral histories collected by LCHP, Lakeland High School was situated as one monument to the community's success. During its operation, 1928-1950, the high school served as a social nucleus for families in Lakeland and other surrounding African American communities. The site is not only significant in constructing the story of Lakeland, but also the larger historical narrative of African Americans in Prince George's County. Structurally, Lakeland High School represents construction trends (in build and materials) so as to further substantiate the significance claim.

Inventory Additions

New Historic Sites

This plan classifies and/or adds 98 properties as historic sites in the plan inventory.

62-023-17	Thomas Matthews House
62-023-21	Queen's Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church Site & Cemetery
64-007	Holst Cabin
65-010	D C Boundary Marker NE 3
65-011	D C Boundary Marker NE 4
65-015	Rizzo House
66-014	Lakeland Community High School
66-015	Buck-Singleton House
66-035-06	Morrill Hall
66-035-07	Calvert Hall
67-006	Beaverdam Creek Bridge
67-008	Civilian Conservation Corps Lodge
67-022-01	Kleindienst-Haker House

1a Significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the county, state, or nation;

1b The site of a significant historic event;

1c Identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society; or

1d Exemplify the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the county and its communities.

To be determined architecturally significant, the property must:

2a Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction;

2b Represent the work of a master craftsman, architect or builder;

2c Possess high artistic values;

2d Represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

2e Represent an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or county, due to its singular physical characteristics or landscape.



Top Left, Figure 2.3: M-NCPPC, "Inventory Additions" from June 2010 in "Approved Historic Sites and Districts Plan."

Top Right, Figure 2.4: M-NCPPC's factors in determining historical significance, 2010.

Bottom, Figure 2.5: Lakeland Community High School, image included in 1983 application. Photo courtesy of Maryland State Archives.

Recognition on the National Register of Historic Places is perhaps the most difficult to obtain. In order to gain historic recognition from the state, an inventory application must be submitted and approved by the Maryland Historic Trust (MHT). The Maryland Historic Trust website explains the pecking order of preservation designation; “The National Register is a program of the U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, and is administered at the State level by the Maryland Historical Trust.”²⁰³ MHT therefore, serves as one subsection of the state-sanctioned historical narrative and the governing body through which federal resources for preservation projects at the state and local level flow.

Of the 1,539 Maryland historic properties on the National Register, 102 properties are in Prince George’s County. Only seven are African American properties or districts. A further breakdown reveals that one listed property includes a discussion of African American presence and historical significance prior to emancipation, four of the seven properties are tied to Freedmen’s Bureau (1865-1872) or Reconstruction Era (1872-1896), and the remaining three are related to African American Suburban Settlement (1896-1964).²⁰⁴ Ironically, despite Lakeland’s community history encompassing both a Reconstruction Era (1872-1896) and the influx of African American suburban settlement (1896-1964), it is not included on the National Register. It is worth noting before moving forward that at the conclusion of my research neither the Lakeland Community, the Lakeland Rosenwald School nor the Lakeland High School were included in the list of seven properties in P.G. County on the National Register of Historic Places²⁰⁵ or the Maryland Register of Historic Properties despite having three applications submitted between 1983 and 2012.²⁰⁶

The MHT list provides one glaring example of the racialized politics of historic preservation at the state level; African American historic sites are clearly underrepresented by the Maryland Historic Trust. This is particularly remarkable when considering the large population of African Americans in Maryland between 1865-1964 and the prevalence of historic African American communities across the state.²⁰⁷ The two early preservation applications for Lakeland (previously mentioned) were submitted in May 1983 by Susan G. Pearl. The Lakeland (Rosenwald) School aka John C. Johnson Elementary School²⁰⁸ and Lakeland High School, are identified on the application as “Blessed Andre Kim Korean Pastoral Mission.”²⁰⁹

As previously noted, the Maryland Historic Trust is the highest ranking, state-sanctioned, partially federally funded agency for historic preservation in Maryland. In order to be included on the National Registry, a Maryland Historic Trust State Historic Sites Inventory form must be completed, voted on and approved by the board. The approved properties are then added to the Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Registry and published online.²¹⁰ The 1983 form is broken up into eleven sections; name, location, classification, owner of property, location of legal description, representation in existing, description, significance, major bibliographical references, geographical data, and form prepared by. In comparing the discourses of the two 1983 applications, I found that both included a discussion of the origins of the community and/or its founders, tied the construction of the institution to Rosenwald funds, and/or implied that Lakeland’s historical significance also lies within its part in a larger network of African American communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Reference to an early founder and the community origin narrative appears in the John C. Johnson (Rosenwald) School application. Pearl writes of, “The community of Lakeland was subdivided and developed by Edwin Newman in the early 1890s...Blacks began to move into Lakeland around the turn of the century, and by 1903 three Black men (Pleasant Brown, Edward Carter and John C. Johnson) were appointed trustees and building committee for a black school there.”²¹¹ Though Lakeland children were already attending school in private homes as early as 1903, and lot #3, Block 34 was deeded to the Board of School Commissioners in 1913 by Newman, it was not until 1926 that the two room schoolhouse was erected.²¹² “John C. Johnson, still a trustee for the Lakeland school, received permission from the owner to use the five lots across the road for a playground for the school.”²¹³ Pearl relates the founding of the school to the origins of the community as well as the cooperative efforts of the Board of School Commissioners in Lakeland. She demonstrates through her significance argument that John C. Johnson Elementary school possesses a larger (and deeper) history than just the 1926 building construction and 1940s addition.

The elementary school represented the degree to which a quality education was supported in the Lakeland community. Pearl writes, “The Lakeland Rosenwald school is presently a tenant residence, and in serious need of repair. It is a significant reminder, however, of the Rosenwald period of school building for blacks, as well as a memorial to a man who worked long and consistently for the progress of Black education.”²¹⁴ Pearl notes that in materials, architectural form, and function that Lakeland’s elementary school was nearly identical to the Bowie school (another one room schoolhouse for African American students). She writes, “The Lakeland Elementary school is a one-story,

high roofed frame building which rests on a high foundation; it is typical of the larger schoolhouses built during the 1920s with Rosenwald funds, and most closely resembles the Bowie School (cf. #71B-10).”²¹⁵

Both applications also identify school construction with Rosenwald funding as significant.²¹⁶ Despite Rosenwald schools beginning to disappear from the landscape by the 1970s, many grassroots preservation organizations still petition state and federal organizations (including the National Trust for Historic Preservation), for resources funds to save these schoolhouses from destruction. The Rosenwald affiliation alone should have leveraged both schools to a prominent position in the preservation discussion simply because there were so few of these schools still standing. Pearl’s attempt to catalogue the significance of these two Lakeland schools is exemplified in her appeal to the larger historical narrative of collaborative national efforts to encourage education in African American communities in the early 20th century.

The Lakeland Community School application also becomes part of an ongoing discussion about saving African American schools. The application emphasizes the community effort of the Lakeland School completion. In the significance section Pearl states, “The Board of Education entertained the first request, by a Lakeland delegation, for the construction of a high school for blacks in Lakeland... The Board of Education was to advance the funds for the purchase of the land, and members of the communities were to repay the advance gradually over a period of years. Money from the Rosenwald fund would pay for the construction of the building.”²¹⁷ Several stakeholders (the seven communities the new high school would serve, the Maryland Board of Education, and the

Rosenwald building program) worked together to complete the schoolhouse, and by July 1929 the sixteen-hundred-dollar loan was repaid to the Board.²¹⁸

The Lakeland Community school application exemplifies a discourse that highlights the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders in the creation of African American educational institutions.²¹⁹ As the John C. Johnson School application, it also suggests that Lakeland was part of a larger network of African American communities across the county.²²⁰ Both of these applications suggest there was a flow of culture and a shared sense of belonging across African American communities in Prince George's County. Through social institutions such as schools, community sustainability was harnessed through shared investment in the educational future of their children and future generations. At the conclusion of my research, the 1983 applications were the only documents submitted to the Maryland Historic Trust until 2012,²²¹ when a "Determination of Eligibility Form" (DOE) was submitted to the Maryland Historic Trust. The DOE is used by "the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) and Maryland's SHPO office to reach 'consensus determinations' between an agency and MHT for resources evaluated in Maryland."²²² According to the Maryland Historic Trust website,

The primary purpose of the DOE form is to fulfill a federal or state agency's obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act or the Maryland Historical Trust Act of 1985 (State Finance and Procurement Article §§5A-325 and 5A-326 of the Annotated Code of Maryland). In the spirit of these laws, DOE forms should provide accurate and meaningful documentation of historic properties that can benefit the public and future researchers. Professionals completing DOE forms should approach them as they would any other piece of research: begin their project with relevant research questions; approach their sources in a critical manner; consider the place of their work within larger efforts to understand Maryland's past; and provide citations, bibliographic notes, and recommendations for future research whenever appropriate.²²³

To demonstrate how contentious preservation can get, I analyze a historic eligibility form that was submitted not by LCHP but by a private agency on behalf of the

Maryland Transit Administration. This application followed the guidelines of the Maryland History Trust's Determination of Eligibility Form to evaluate Lakeland's historic significance. The 2012 application has many of the same components as the 1983 applications. It is clear that the formatting of the document was updated, but the criteria for eligibility were retained; "Lakeland was evaluated for significance under National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Criteria A, B, and C using the guidelines set forth in the NRHP bulletin 'How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,' and the "Maryland Suburbanization Historic Context and Survey Methodology."²²⁴ The 2012 application is prepared by the preservation firm John Milner and Associates Inc. on behalf of the Maryland Transit Authority as part of the Purple Line Project.²²⁵ Though an overview of Lakeland's development by Newman, the Rosenwald Schools and the earliest religious institutions are briefly referenced, the overall tone of the application is critical of the historic *significance* of Lakeland. Included in the description and justification of Lakeland's eligibility are the following comments that stood out:

1. It is not an important community or design type that influenced suburbanization trends in Maryland or the Washington, D.C. region.
2. It is also not know [sic] to be associated with other events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history.
3. As a community, Lakeland has lost integrity of design and setting due to the loss of much of its historic fabric for construction of multi-family complexes and the Lake Artemesia Natural Area.
4. Individually, none of the houses or community buildings is significant for its design.
5. It is recommended that Lakeland remain not eligible for listing in the Maryland and/or the National Register of Historic Places due to its lack of significance and integrity.
6. Through the years, the area's integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association has been altered greatly.

The overall tone of these comments devalues Lakeland's importance.²²⁶ Turem and Clark claim that Lakeland has no historical significance or integrity due to the "loss of much of its historical fabric,"²²⁷ but fail to mention it was state-sanctioned, federal-funded urban

renewal policies that removed much of the turn of the century historical building value from the east side of Lakeland. The irony inherent in their evaluation of Lakeland's historical significance is that the very landscape that would elevate Lakeland's historical value according to the criteria set by MHT was stripped from Lakelanders to accommodate state funded development in the 1970s urban renewal plan. Lakeland, deemed ineligible for historic designation on April 2, 2012, remains unprotected.²²⁸

In August of 2013, the Federal Transit Administration and Maryland Transportation Administration published its "Section 106 Assessment of Effects for Historic Properties." Under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the state needed to assess the historic properties in Montgomery and Prince George's counties before moving forward with the purple line transit project.²²⁹ The abstract states,

Section 106 regulations require that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) identify historic properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) within the project's Area of Potential Effects (APE); assess effects to historic properties; avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate any adverse effects; and consult with Maryland's State Historic Preservation Officer, as represented by the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), and other consulting parties throughout the Section 106 process, as appropriate.²³⁰

Lakeland was included in this assessment and no effect was identified on the community.

The same criteria used to evaluate historic properties by the NRHP were cited in the Section 106 assessment.²³¹ The 2013 "Section 106 Assessment of Effects for Historic Properties" identifies how historical significance is evaluated; "If a property is determined to possess historic significance, its integrity is evaluated using the following seven aspects of integrity to determine if it conveys historic significance: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association."²³²

In looking for Lakeland's presence across three Maryland preservation registries, I sought to tease out how historical significance is framed. I was most interested in identifying the gaps of preservation protection for Lakeland. To do so, I evaluated the discourse of three eligibility applications to the Maryland National Trust and provided a comparative analysis of the 1983 and the 2012 applications. I concluded that neither Lakeland, nor any of its historic buildings in the community, is part of the Maryland Register of Historic Properties or the National Register.²³³ In these examples, I analyzed the role state and national agencies play in deeming a site significant (in some cases insignificant), and addressed the ways in which these designations (or lack thereof) are utilized to defer (or accelerate) urban renewal projects across Lakeland's history. In the most extreme case, a private firm was hired to aid in subduing the voices of resistance from the margins. Though historic designation and protection from further encroachment were the primary goals of the 1983 applications, the 2012 application signifies the fact that Lakeland could potentially face further desolation at the hands of the state.

Despite pending threats, Lakelanders continue to strive for recognition in public history discourses. LCHP was influential in securing county recognition for Lakeland as a historic neighborhood through M-NCPPC through the help of community volunteers.²³⁴ Two markers highlight Lakeland's rich history and are situated along the banks of Lake Artemisia. The markers, entitled "Family, Faith, and Community," paint the history of Lakeland with a broad stroke—focusing on family and faith as the unifying pillars of the community (Figure 2.6). By drawing the public's attention to this aspect of life in Lakeland, LCHP members were able to reconstruct the historical narrative onto the landscape. LCHP is employing a similar strategy as the grassroots organizers discussed in

Angel David Nieves' article "Public History and 'Memorial Architecture' in the 'New' South Africa: The Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum, Soweto, Johannesburg."

The collective efforts by grassroots organizers in post-apartheid South Africa to create a local history museum demonstrates the resistive practices at work when marginalized community narratives are excluded from the national conversation. In Lakeland, the markers are reflective of the preservation agenda of LCHP and provide an example of the resistive preservation activism of everyday citizens. While many of the images and rhetoric included on the markers are also represented in the Lakeland local history book, the visibility of the markers in the public park allows Lakeland's history to reach a wider audience.



Figure 2.6: Two community funded historical markers celebrate "Family, Faith and Community in Lakeland." Unlike the Lomax marker, these were funded and written by members of LCHP and focused on the early history of the community. Photo courtesy of Dr. Mary Corbin Sies.

Two additional preservation efforts demonstrated the dedication of Lakelanders in and outside of LCHP. These place-making efforts included two initiatives; a community funded commemorative marker where Dervey Lomax's childhood home once stood on the east side of Lakeland (Figure 2.7) and a community mural created in honor Lakeland's rich history (Figure 2.8 and 2.9). The Lomax marker pays tribute to one of Lakeland's most well-known residents. The inscription on the marker reads as follows:

On this site was the boyhood home of Dervey Augusta Lomax, first Mayor of African American ancestry in the City of College Park from 1973-1975. This site was part of the residential/business Lakeland community prior to the creation of Lake Artemesia Natural Area and the Metro. Lomax represented Lakeland as a College Park City Council member for 27 years, from 1957 to 1965, 1967 to 1973, and 1979 to 1989. His vision resulted in a successful urban renewal program for Lakeland, which includes the College Park Community Center and the Paint Branch Elementary School. Lomax served on the Prince George's County Human Relations Commission and Prince George's County Police Department Citizen Complaint Oversight Panel, and is especially recognized for his role in desegregating public schools in Prince George's County. Lomax was a friend to many, and touched the lives of countless people as a direct result of his official duties. He lived his life in his beloved Lakeland except for four years when he left to serve his country with the U.S. Navy in World War II. This is a contemplative site commemorating Lakeland's history and its beloved Mayor Dervey A. Lomax.²³⁵



Figure 2.7: Dervey Lomax Historical Marker, located on the west bank of Lake Artemesia. Photo courtesy of greenbeltlive.com.

The Lomax memorial marker, dedicated on May 16, 2009, is one of Lakeland's most visible interventions into the public discourses of Prince George's history.²³⁶ The language that sticks out from the marker situates Lomax as a "visionary" who brought a "successful" urban renewal to Lakeland.

Urban renewal remains a contentious and divisive issue to many Lakelanders even today. In fact, while conducting oral history testimonies in 2008, informants shied away from discussing the intrapolitics of urban renewal in Lakeland.²³⁷ When juxtaposed to the narrative in the *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park* it seems the marker's language takes a more positive view of Lomax's role in urban renewal. This suggests the variation in interpretation may, in part, be because of the institutional stakeholder M-NCPPC. The marker's language shifts the narrative of urban renewal by situating Lomax as influential in the "vision" of urban renewal in Lakeland. This also subtly downplays the role the city of College Park played in redeveloping the eastside of Lakeland. As an institutional stakeholder, M-NCPPC shaped the interpretation of Lakeland's urban renewal policies for the commemorative marker and discursively shifted the historical narrative in the public sphere.

The second initiative, a community mural created in partnership with the University of Maryland, will be discussed in greater detail in the next section that addresses collaborative efforts by LCHP. In each of these projects, the place-making process tied the community history to a larger narrative of African Americans in Prince George's County. They also illustrate the ways in which adding institutional stakeholders can shift the preservation narratives for grassroots preservation organizations in marginalized communities. In doing so, organizations like LCHP can parlay the

community narrative generated from their grassroots archive into the public history sphere.

Collaborative Preservation in Lakeland

The pairing of grassroots preservation groups and educational institutions, particularly colleges and universities, is an effective partnering that has documented success rates. In “From Troubled Ground to Common Ground”: The Locust Grove African American Cemetery Restoration Project: A Case Study of Service-Learning and Community History,” Steven Berg outlines how a struggling grassroots preservation association yielded few successful results until they partnered with a local university and a larger, more visible, historical nonprofit. Burg writes,

The campaign brought together three organizations— a volunteer cemetery association, a nonprofit historical society, and a history department at a state university—three different organizations with three different institutional cultures, three different constituencies, three different missions, and even three different perspectives on the cemetery’s significance. Although such a union could have been volatile, and differences did occur, a shared commitment to the common objective of seeing the cemetery preserved—and a great deal of behind-the-scenes diplomacy—allowed the organizations to work together to achieve our goals.²³⁸

This section focuses on two collaborative efforts between LCHP and the University of Maryland. I argue that LCHP and UMD share a mutually beneficial relationship that, 1) Allows LCHP to draw on a variety of resources from a state funded educational institution and 2) Permits UMD to partner with a community organization in order to provide service learning opportunities to its students. An analysis of two projects undertaken by the LHCP and UMD partnership allows a space to explore the role institutional stakeholders play in shaping the agendas of grassroots preservation organizations.

The most recent partnership between the Lakeland community and the University was a collaborative mural project. Members of LCHP, UMD, and others with ties to the Lakeland community worked together to paint an eight panel mural in December 2012 and January 2013 (Figure 2.8 & 2.9). The mural collaboration is an excellent starting point in analyzing the role institutional stakeholders have in influencing community projects. Since early 2009, LCHP had discussed creating a mural on the underpass wall that connects central Lakeland with the community park and Lake Artemisia. However, the continued maintenance of the underpass made this wall a poor candidate for the mural's permanent home. Several years of planning and debate ensued regarding what to include on the mural and which artist should LCHP commission to tell their story through art. Helina Metaferia was chosen to head the project. Ms. Metaferia has worked on several public art exhibits across the United States. Her CV states the Lakeland Mural project was funded by the University of Maryland, but makes no mention of the collaborative efforts between the University and LCHP.²³⁹

UMD Good Neighbor Day is a volunteer service day that seeks to build lasting relationships with the citizens of College Park through community outreach and beautification projects.



Figure 2.8: On April 6, 2013 the mural was unveiled in the of Community Engagement for this project. Photo courtesy of LCHP website.



Figure 2.9: LCHP member Maxine Gross, UMD Maters of Public Policy student Emily Adams, and Paint Branch Elementary School student Karla Contreras collaborate on in the mural project. Photo courtesy of UMD Division of Administration and Finance website.

The office of Community Engagement at the University of Maryland along with LCHP organized the project. The initiative was funded by UMD’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion as well as a grant from the Pepsi Enhancement Fund. The mural not only represents collaborative efforts between the University and LCHP, it also brings in community partners such as Paint Branch Elementary, Parkdale High School and City of College Park councilmembers.

The “Lakeland Past and Present Community Mural” was unveiled at the Lakeland Community Center on April 6, 2013. It was part of UMD’s Good Neighbor Day celebration.²⁴⁰ In the months following the celebration, Lakelanders requested community input regarding where to place the mural. Initially, four possibilities emerged from discussions between the City of College Park and the Lakeland Civic Association. The following locations were proposed:

- A. The entrance to Lakeland Park, at the corner of Rhode Island Avenue and Lakeland Rd.
- B. Lakeland Park tennis courts up against the fence.
- C. Along the recreational trail leading from Lakeland to Lake Artemesia, the benches beside by the lake.
- D. Outside the College Park Community Center facing Pierce Ave.²⁴¹



The final two design options are illustrated in Figure 2.10 and 2.11. The mural project represents yet another joint initiative where LCHP partnered with institutional stakeholders to complete an agenda item. In this case, the University of Maryland provided some of the necessary resources (funding, student volunteers, and a larger platform of visibility) to get the project off the ground and completed.²⁴² LCHP provided advertising, community volunteers and a workspace in the community center to complete the mural. As an educational institution and stakeholder, the investment in the success of the mural project was, in part, linked to the discourses of philanthropy inherent in the rhetoric of the university sponsored “Good Neighbor Day.” The event was described as a cross-campus service project. The Division of Administration and Finance describes “Good Neighbor Day [as] a partnership between UMD, the City of College Park and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and represents a renewed commitment by the UMD community to being a good neighbor in College Park.”²⁴³ The collaborative efforts showcase the utility of marginalized communities partnering with resource-laden institutions. LCHP was able to accomplish an agenda action item that had existed since 2009, and in doing so continued to facilitate a working relationship with the city, university and M-NCPPC.

In 2009 LCHP partnered with the American Studies Department and Historic Preservation program at the University of Maryland developed a community research strategy to specifically uncover the ways in which urban renewal effected (and continues to effect) Lakeland.²⁴⁴ The collaborative efforts of LCHP and the University of Maryland in preserving African American history in College Park manifested through the course *Social and Ethnic Issues in Historic Preservation*. The class examined the ways in which

community heritage is sustained and preserved at the grassroots level despite the various factors, like urban renewal, that contribute to its deterioration.²⁴⁵ A historical report and public presentation were provided to LCHP and the larger Lakeland community at the conclusion of the course in an effort to synthesize some of the history and major findings dealing with urban renewal in the historic neighborhood. The class focused on Lakeland from 2009-2014. Additional class projects included mapping a walking tour through the Lakeland, a documentary film that examined educational institutions in Lakeland, and a series of academic talks by Dr. Mary Corbin Sies.

Engaging in collaborative preservation efforts propelled LCHP into a larger network of community preservation activism in College Park. This ultimately led to wider visibility and resources at the disposal of LCHP, which, in turn, aided in their execution of the preservation agenda put forth in the early years of their founding. Although introducing institutional stakeholders shaped the execution of their agenda, it did not, overall, shift the preservation agenda or remove the authorship of Lakeland's historical narrative from the hands of the grassroots organization. The pairing of grassroots preservation groups and academic departments is a successful partnering that has documented success rates. In "From Troubled Ground to Common Ground": The Locust Grove African American Cemetery Restoration Project: A Case Study of Service-Learning and Community History" Steven Berg outlines how a struggling grassroots preservation association yielded few successful results until they partnered with a local university and a larger, more visible, historical nonprofit. Berg writes,

The campaign brought together three organizations—a volunteer cemetery association, a nonprofit historical society, and a history department at a state university—three different organizations with three different institutional cultures, three different constituencies, three different missions, and even three different perspectives on the cemetery's significance. Although such a union could have been volatile, and differences did occur, a shared commitment to the

common objective of seeing the cemetery preserved—and a great deal of behind-the-scenes diplomacy—allowed the organizations to work together to achieve our goals.”²⁴⁶

An approach to historic preservation that includes the family historian’s methods and contributions to LCHP can reveal the larger social and cultural issues that affect the political workings of the organization, and in some ways, the community, itself. These amateur historians initiate preservation efforts in their communities by expanding upon family preservation in the following ways; storytelling; scrapbooking; quilting; genealogy research; attending family reunions; collecting pictures and family obituaries; passing down family names and recipes; collecting of material objects; teaching children how to care for hair; or sharing lore about ancestors; and passing down nicknames. Often these family historians lack the professional training acquired by the traditional historian, relying instead on experiential knowledge, oral histories, and public access information found on the internet or in public libraries. Their efforts are no less important to the construction of historical narratives in the community. In Harriette Pipes McAddo’s *Black Families*, the family historian exemplifies the idea of self-determination. McAddo states, “The principle of self-determination carries with it the assumption that we have the right and responsibility to exist as people and make our own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history. It urges us as a people to not surrender our culture and identity to fit into the culture of another.”²⁴⁷ The role of the family/community historian then, becomes a position of power.²⁴⁸

When taken together the family historians and grassroots organizers in Lakeland as well as the University of Maryland’s institutional support through resource allocation were successful vehicles in piecing together the Lakeland community’s historical narrative. The embodiment of family and community history and institutional support is

exemplified in the African American Storytellers Circle hosted at the University of Maryland in 2011 (Fig. 2.12). As another collaborative project with UMD, the storytellers included in the program had strong ties to the community and/or the LCHP organization. The keynote storyteller, Dr. Joanne Braxton, can trace her Lakeland lineage back to the first African American resident. Her scholarship has addressed the vibrant history of Lakeland, the trauma of urban renewal, and the sense of belonging that Lakelanders continue to bond over 110 years after the community's founding. The event featured Lakeland residents who shared, through oral tradition and material artifacts, the history of the community; many narratives began with a discussion of family. The medium in which the program was delivered draws from the long tradition of oral transmission of African American history. Taken together, these stories represented the mosaic of experiences in Lakeland. The event provided a platform for Lakelanders to share their personal/ family/ community histories. Finally, the program represented another combined effort by LCHP and UMD to insert Lakeland's history into the meta-discussion of marginalized communities that address social justice through historic preservation.

EXPLORE COMMUNITY! AFRICAN AMERICAN STORYTELLING CIRCLE

Listen to the voices of the Lakeland community in College Park as they share the important yet complex 110-year history between their once segregated African-American community and the University of Maryland. Master storyteller Dr. Joanne Braxton will speak from 11 A.M. – Noon.



Saturday, April 30, 2011
10 A.M. To 4 P.M.

Cole Fieldhouse
(Outside The Driskell Center)
University of Maryland

Rain or Shine Admission and Parking are Free

Generations of Lakelanders: Photo of Harriet Hughes of Lakeland (seated)
Photo courtesy of the Gross family of Lakeland in College Park, MD

MARYLAND 2011
EXPLORE OUR WORLD!



COLLEGE OF
ARTS & HUMANITIES

This event is sponsored by the Department of American Studies, College of Arts & Humanities, and the Lakeland Community Heritage Project.

Figure 2.12. Flier advertising African American Storytellers event at Maryland Day in 2011. The family photograph illustrates multiple generations of Lakeland women who transmit and pass down heritage and historical knowledge about family and community. Photo courtesy of UMD Digital archive.

This explored the foundational history of Lakeland, a historically African American community in College Park, Maryland. It chronicled the grassroots preservation efforts initiated by the Lakeland Community Heritage Project and examined the ways in which oral history and personal photograph collections from Lakelanders heavily influenced the community archive. I analyzed the rhetoric in historic designation marker applications across three different preservation registries, and provided examples of contentious politics in preservation, particularly when dealing with urban renewal planning. I highlighted the overall effectiveness of the University of Maryland and LCHP's collaborative efforts and uncovered the centrality of Lakeland women in the processes of collecting, preserving and protecting local history. This chapter argued that LCHP's methods of preservation and strategies to gain visibility in the public sphere can serve as an effective model for other preservation groups operating from the margins. In addition to oral history testimonies, personal photograph collections, church and school records, deed research, and census data, LCHP formed lasting relationships with resource-laden institutions to accomplish their preservation agendas. In the following chapter, I will analyze another community preservation organization on the margins and address the ways in which some of their preservation activism parallels that of LCHP's.

Chapter Three: Standing on Faith in the Face of Destruction: St. John Baptist Church and the Struggle for Historical Significance

*"On this rock I will build My church. The powers of hell will not be able to have power over My church."*²⁴⁹

Drive down Oilfield Road in Missouri City on any day of the week and you may have unknowingly passed a prized piece of African American Texas history. St. John Missionary Baptist Church, founded in 1869 by former slaves, is nestled on two acres of land adjacent to one of Missouri City's largest master planned suburban communities (Figure 3.1). Suburban development has completely transformed the landscape, as what was once rural farm land is now the site of half million dollar homes in gated communities.

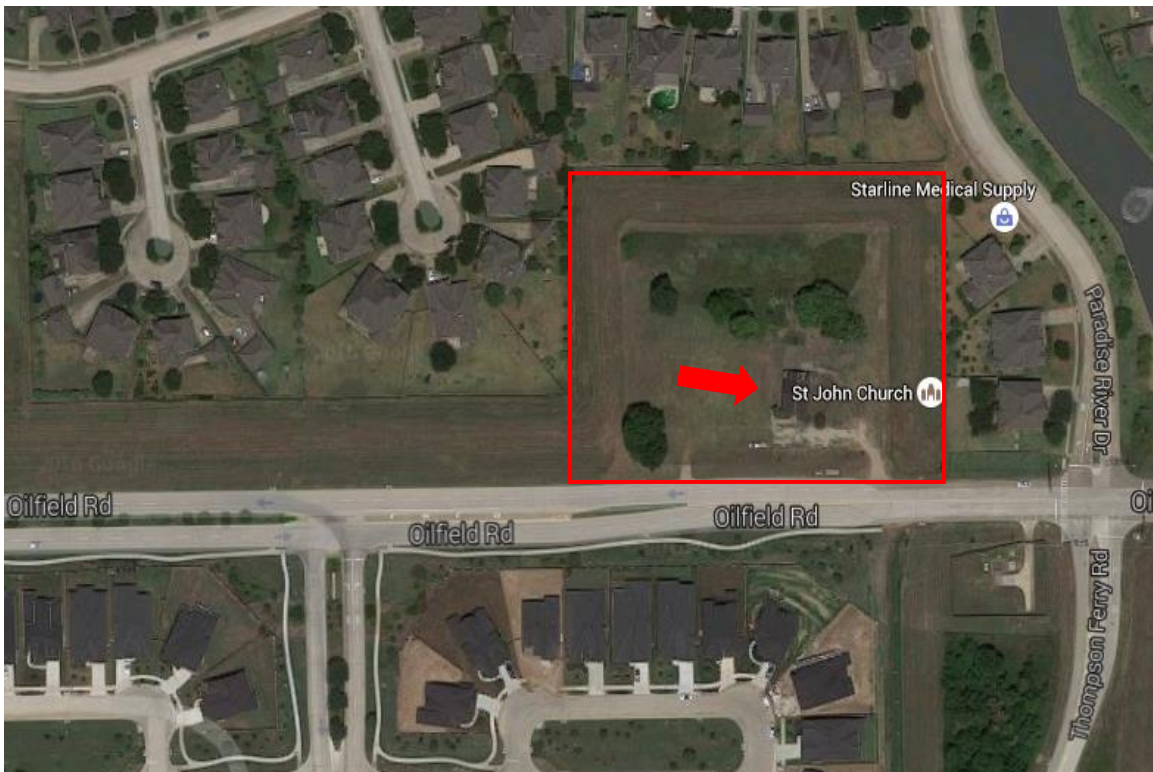


Figure 3.1: Aerial view of St. John Baptist Church site. Google Maps, accessed by the author March 25, 2016.

The rugged old cross atop the steeple and weathered wooden panels of the church's exterior both pay tribute to the endurance of the building. This church has sustained fires, vandalism, hurricanes, racially motivated violence and low membership. Currently the church lacks running water and electricity due to arson in 2006; no suspects were apprehended. Senior Pastor David Fisher arrives early every Sunday to run a generator from his pickup in order to provide light for the building. Despite all of this exterior deterioration, the building's indestructibility pales in comparison to the sustained faith of the congregation inside.

The context of St. John's story is rooted in the history of African Americans in Fort Bend County immediately after the Civil War. Despite being victims of violence, degradation, and oppressive institutions, African Americans created vibrant, dynamic and supportive communities, particularly through the establishment of churches and spiritual centers.²⁵⁰ When I first entered the little old church at 6731 Oilfield Road the members were hand-in-hand in prayer. Attempting to tip-toe down the side aisle and gingerly place my things on the pew, I was quickly announced by a misstep and subsequent crick from the worn wooden floorboards. Spotted and called forward to join hands, I found myself overwhelmed with the *power* present in that place at that moment. Every Sunday, rain or shine, St. John Baptist Missionary members came to worship and praise. Though currently small in number, the congregation is strong in their commitment to carry on through faith. The community of seniors that make up this congregation bring years of wisdom and awareness to the preservation of their heritage (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.2: St. John (Colored) Missionary Baptist Church, 1930s. Photo Courtesy of Fort Bend County Archives.



Above: Figure 3.3: St. John Baptist Church in 2013. Pastor David Fisher in foreground. Photo courtesy of Houston Chronicle article, February 8, 2013.

Below: Figure 3.4: St. John Missionary Baptist Church congregation. Image taken June 19, 2014. Photo courtesy of St. John Baptist Church website.

The geographic landscape of the site, the social and cultural significance of the church community, and the architectural history of the church building make St. John Baptist Church a unique case study in examining the ways in which historical narratives are constructed onto nervous landscapes. The St. John Fundraising and Preservation Committee (Friends of St. John) set out to fulfill the twofold agenda of “pursuing final approval by its Fort Bend municipality as an historic landmark, and preparing to revitalize its 146 year old church.”²⁵¹ Through a series of programming efforts which included the annual church anniversary celebration, an ambitious public awareness campaign, and Juneteenth festivities, Friends of St. John (FSJC) sought to convey the multiple layers of the significance of the church and the necessity to pursue funding for restoration.

In many ways, FSJC is remarkably similar in their preservation mission to LCHP. Both seek to preserve their community’s heritage by recovering historical artifacts and protecting historic sites. Both are comprised of grassroots volunteers that hold deep ties to the community. Sister Irene Hayes and Nany Woods, for example, can trace their family lineage back to the 1850s. Hayes’ grandfather and father were both deacons in the church, and she served as church secretary before illness made it difficult for her to continue secretarial responsibilities. LCHP and FSJC have utilized personal archives from family albums to supplement their community histories. While LCHP is further along in the preservation process, FSJC has followed similar strategies of preservation to save the historic church. Over the course of this study, one point of difference I found between the two organizations was the manner in which women took leadership roles. With LCHP, women held positions of authority in the organization and were active in

speaking publically about the Lakeland community. Among others, Violetta Sharps Jones served as a public relations representative for the organization and organized many speaking engagements around the county through LCHP's Speaker's Bureau. Within FSJC, women have taken a supporting role in the organization, pursuing opportunities for research and organization of artifacts moreso than speaking publically about FSJC's cause. Congregation sisters Irene Hayes, Rosa Graves and Nancy Woods all contributed to the FSJC archive, but were reluctant to speak publicly. Instead, they aided the deacons and minister in preparing speeches and organizing events. Though the internal structure of each of these organizations differed, their missions connected their preservation efforts and strategies.

Similar in structure to Chapter two, this chapter highlights the history of the church community as it relates to the larger narrative of Texas' Freedmen during Reconstruction, the preservation efforts of FSJC, and the process of securing historic designation from the Texas Historical Commission. When available, FSJC utilized oral histories and personal photograph collections to construct part of their historical narrative. However, because of arson at the church in 2006, much of the church's records were lost. Therefore, FSJC had to shift their preservation paradigm to rely instead on records held at the county level and to a lesser extend in personal collections. Utilizing county records to reconstruct the history of the church posed a unique problem. In most cases, St. John was absent from the archive as it is situated in the town of Dewalt, which no longer exists in Fort Bend County.



Figure 3.5: Media from Fox 26 news. Aerial coverage of arson damage to St. John. Image included in Gabriel Cuellar's Historic Building Assessment, page 10.

Similarly, the lack of recordkeeping concerning African American residents in the county during the late 19th century made it difficult to construct the churches origin narrative.²⁵² The existing county records for the church, namely three deeds, church and school records from the late 19th century, and a set of historical maps, were essentially all we had to chronicle the church's history.

This chapter argues that FSJC's toolkit builds upon the LCHP model, and serves as an additional example for grassroots preservationists who experience challenges in locating source material for their community archives. Examining FSJC's experience is also beneficial in revealing the ways in which absences in the archive can provide a space for grassroots preservationists to insert insurgent narratives. This chapter provides a brief history of St. John before moving into a discussion of the deed research conducted by Deacon Gerald Rivers prior to my involvement with the committee. I explore the

language of these deeds, particularly the stipulations of the use of land as outlined in the 1935 deeds and evaluate the efforts of the St. John women who helped to construct the initial church archive from their personal collections and documents from the church. I analyze the factors that contributed to the decision by the committee to make the male deacons and minister of the church the public face of St. John's preservation efforts. Finally, this chapter chronicles the collaborative efforts of FSJC in securing historic designation from the Texas Historical Commission and addresses the ways in which the construction of a historical narrative that included a history of Dewalt County along with the discussion of the church and school ultimately held the key to securing designation in early 2016.

St. John's History

Thad Sitton and James Conrad write in *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black*

Texans in the Time of Jim Crow,

Freedmen's settlements were independent rural communities of African American landowners (and land squatters) that formed in the South in the years after Emancipation. 'Freedom colonies,' as blacks sometimes called them, were to a degree anomalies in a post-war South where white power elites rapidly resumed social, economic, and political control and the system of sharecropping came to dominate.²⁵³

This trend was not just occurring in rural areas; African American migration to urban centers also created ethnic enclaves within the city limits.²⁵⁴ The cultural legacy of St. John's spiritual community exemplifies this trend.²⁵⁵ Oral history testimony collected from Irene Hayes identified that St. John (Colored) Missionary Baptist Church was founded by former slaves from the Dewalt plantation in 1869.²⁵⁶ Hayes, who has been a member of St. John all her life, recalls that it was likely the congregation had established a spiritual community prior to its official founding.²⁵⁷ The clue, Hayes asserted, was in her family name of Woods. In comparing the 1867 voter registration records and the

1870 census records there are at least two Freedmen, Green and Alfred, with the Woods surname who were close in age to slaves listed as belonging to Thomas Waters Dewalt in the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules.²⁵⁸ Both Green and Alfred Woods are included in the Thomas Waters Dewalt account book as sharecroppers living on Dewalt's property between 1866 and 1874 (Figure 3.6).²⁵⁹ Two additional Woods women are found on the 1870²⁶⁰ census; fifty-year-old Gracie Woods, wife of Green Woods,²⁶¹ and nineteen-year-old Rachel Woods, wife of Alfred Woods.

It is likely both couples continued to live and work on the Dewalt plantation after emancipation. Both women are listed in the 1870 census as "keeping house" but only Rachel is included in the account book records.²⁶² On the same page of the account book, Alfred is listed as purchasing a lead pencil for .10 cents, a plug of tobacco for .50 cents, shoes for his wife for 5.00 and, in August 1873, "land where he lives on land."²⁶³ Though a sale price for the land is not documented by Dewalt, Alfred's land purchase is likely in addition to the personal property listed on the 1870 census.²⁶⁴ The four Woods narratives shed light on the everyday experiences of African American life in Fort Bend County during the antebellum years and Reconstruction. These records also connect part of St. John's history to the slave owner Thomas Waters Dewalt. Examining the community of freedmen who founded the church meant a close examination of the historical records of Dewalt as well. Through probate and census records, tax rolls, and presence in the public sphere through newspaper editorials, I was able to establish the points at which T. W. Dewalt's history intersected with the Woods' families.²⁶⁵ It became clear that some of the founding members of the church were held in bondage on Dewalt's plantation before the Civil War.

33, Alfred Wood Dr. to Thos. W. Dewalt		1866
Brought forward from page 57		\$28. 35-
Nov	13	To one plug tobacco - 30
Nov	25	one pr. boots 4. 50
Dec	7	1/2 lb salt by Mother-in-law 15
"	11	2 1/2 lbs bacon 20. 00 9 lbs beef 8. 00
"	"	1/2 plug tobacco - 25 = 6. 35
Dec	20	To cash in Houston to 3 4 40
Given for Alfred Ballance -		3 00
1867		3 7 60
May	7	Alfred Wood Dr. to Dewalt
To one plug tobacco (M.)		50
Jan	1867	For marrying - 5. 00
Feb.	10 th	Rachel lost two days 25 th per day 50
"	16	one lb sugar for wife - 20
"	17	To one dose oil & dose of spice 20
"	24	Rachel lost 20 days 25 th 5. 00
"	14	cash for shoes for Rachel 1. 00 13 40
Apr	4	Neglecting & refusing to cook on Sunday - 2 00
"	15	one led pencil - 10
"	"	no dinner or supper 20 30
"	"	Two yokes & harness -
"	22	Cash twelve ^{5. 00} dollars specie - 12. 50
"	24	Cash in specie in Houston 3. 00
"	25	Rachel quit work inclusive 25 th
May	18 th	Rachel moved to McGowan place, 6 days board & 25 th 1. 50
"	"	Cash in specie - 32. 50
"	"	34. 20
June	6	cash - 1. 85
June	15	36. 05
"	"	To 20 lbs bacon 15. 00 - Ballance) 3 00,
Apr 1873	"	To land sent - where he lives on land
Feb.	"	of Ballance & Spence Dr. Hill. & Co for 1873 3. 00
"	"	To ballance in horse trade - 11. 25 = 14. 25
1873 Jan 24	"	one gun - 20. 00 (see)
March 10	"	To putting in one wagon tongue \$1. 50
mending hound behind not done		

Figure 3.6: Alfred and Rachel Wood's economic exchanges with Dewalt between 1866-1873. The arrow identifies Alfred Wood purchasing land in 1873. Scan courtesy of Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives.

Thomas Waters Dewalt migrated to Fort Bend County, Texas from, Newberry South Carolina, and purchased land from the Bright and Roark leagues to build his plantation.²⁶⁶ He entered the state in 1845, bringing with him four inherited slaves.²⁶⁷ Dewalt descended from a long line of slave owning aristocracy in Newberry, South Carolina.²⁶⁸ Upon his father's death in 1853 the probate records indicate that Thomas received an advance of \$600.00 and four slaves (no names listed).²⁶⁹ Two of these four slaves listed on the Fort Bend County slave schedules from 1850 and 1860 were the products of inheritance from his father. A third slave, Ann, was sold in 1847 in Texas.²⁷⁰ It is probable that the fourth unnamed slave was male, based on the stipulations of Daniel Dewalt Sr.'s will. All of Dewalt's received four slaves each, with special instruction to the executors of his estate to "purchase four slaves, two males and two female, between the ages of fourteen to twenty years or to select such slaves or either of them which may answer the above description among the slave which I may possess at the time of my death."²⁷¹

When T.W. Dewalt migrated to Texas in 1845 he became part of the large socio-cultural climate of the slave economy in Fort Bend County. Fort Bend's proximity to local markets, just six hours from Houston and ten from Galveston by stagecoach, coupled with the open fields, fertile soil, and easy access to the Brazos River, was ideal for planter life. Two additional bills of sale bear witness to the regularity of Dewalt's participation in the Texas slave economy. A manifest of slaves from the S.S. Louisiana identifies Jim, a 5'6" thirty-eight year-old black slave, as being shipped from the port of New Orleans to Galveston on February 12, 1853 (Figure 3.7).²⁷² Another manifest of

slaves lists Betsy, a 5'2", twenty-year-old, copper colored slave, onboard the S.S. Mexico from New Orleans to Galveston on May 8, 1860 (Figure 3.8).²⁷³

Slave labor was central to Dewalt's success in the county.²⁷⁴ The census records from 1850 and 1860 provide additional insight into Dewalt's life in Fort Bend prior to the War. According to the 1850 census and slave schedule, Dewalt was living in Fort Bend County and owned 15 slaves.²⁷⁵ The 1860 census identifies Dewalt as a 34-year-old farmer, married to 20-year-old Charlotte and still living in Fort Bend. The slave schedule from the same year shows that Dewalt owned 18 slaves ranging in age from three to fifty.²⁷⁶ His attitude towards the institution of slavery is best exemplified in a *Galveston Daily News* article from December 18, 1860; just two days before South Carolina seceded from the Union. Thomas Waters Dewalt's name appeared on a register under "Public Meetings in Texas." The prologue reads, "we continue our summary of mass meetings in the counties, to express the sentiments of the people towards Lincoln's administration and the action they wish their state authorities and sister counties to pursue."²⁷⁷

Under Fort Bend County, Thomas Waters Dewalt signed a compact that stated the secession committee,

"pledge the support of the citizens (illegible) any course Texas may adopt against the (illegible) administered by Lincoln; also to any state that may secede, and which a Black (illegible) administration may attempt to coerce; (illegible) compact has been violated by the North(illegible) their action on slavery and just cause (illegible) the Southern States, if they deem it expedient (illegible) back on their reserved rights."²⁷⁸ As the editorial illustrates, the sentiments echoed across the state, with one county surmising, "it to be the duty of Texas to withdraw from the Union and immediately prepare to resist a Black Republican Administration."²⁷⁹

Here, Dewalt not only identified as a secessionist, but publically denounced Lincoln's administration and any attempt by the federal government to abolish the institution of slavery. Oral history testimony suggests Dewalt was keenly aware that owning property in the political nucleus of the county would keep him socially and politically connected to Fort Bend's elites. Dewalt's tax records confirm he was a prominent slaveholder in Fort Bend County, and held political power because of it.²⁸⁰

The growth of Dewalt's capital from 1861-1864 is indicative of ideological and financial investment in the institution of slavery in the Confederacy. By 1865, however, the tide had shifted; the Confederate defeat and subsequent surrender brought with it a new social code in the South. When General Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse, the gravity of the situation hit home for Fort Bend residents who "passed a resolution in favor of fighting on instead of surrendering. The resolution offered to arm and equip 30,000 Negroes to aid in holding Texas."²⁸¹ An excerpt from the document announces that , "under no circumstances and in no event will we submit to our dominating and perfidious enemies who have placed an ocean of blood between us which cannot be crossed nor dried." ²⁸² The proverbial "final nail" in the Confederate coffin was laid in June; General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston with the news that, under General Order No. 3,

The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labor. The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.²⁸³

The first Juneteenth must have been unprecedentedly jubilant for African Americans. For many whites in Fort Bend County, however, the bitter taste of southern defeat coupled with a seething distain for emancipated African Americans made the landscape a hostile and dangerous place. Freedmen's Bureau and voter registration reports serve as our eyes and ears into the 19th -century geography of power within Fort Bend.²⁸⁴ Economic inequity, violent attacks on freedmen's social institutions and racial backlash when resistance occurred are just a few of the difficulties faced by Freedmen between 1866-1870.

It was amid this nervous landscape that St. John (Colored) Baptist Church was founded by the once enslaved African Americans living on Dewalt's Plantation. Oral history testimony notes that despite all of this, the African American community in Fort Bend, and particularly St. John [Colored] Missionary Baptist Church continued to grow. St. John was one of the religious centers for African Americans in the county. During the 1870s and 1880s several small community churches sprouted up across the county, sharing economic resources and providing spiritual support for the African Americans in Fort Bend. Architectural historian Gabriel Cuellar mapped the various African American churches that dotted the landscape between 1870 and 1930 (Figure 3.10). One such example is the relationship Mount Olive Church and St. John shared. Oral history testimony denotes many happy memories between the two congregations including church anniversary celebrations, bazaars, and Juneteenth picnics.

In the early years, the churches even shared a minister who rotated bi-monthly between each church. The social and cultural autonomy of the early African American churches suggests that African Americans in Fort Bend County created interconnected

communities for survival. They aided each other in surviving the difficult cultural terrain of Southeast Texas. Though little exists today that documents these connections, oral histories from congregation members have consistently testified to the network of African American churches that once existed across Fort Bend.

The county archives provided additional images to illustrate aspects of the first and second generation freedmen experience in Fort Bend (Figures 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, and 3.15). These extraordinary images bring to light the everyday lives of African Americans during this period. In the next section, I will examine the utility of county archive source material, namely, the 1900 and 1935 deeds, in aiding Friends of St. John in constructing the church's historical narrative.



Figure 3.9: Potato Farming in Fort Bend County. Part of the sharecropping system. Photo courtesy of Fort Bend County archives

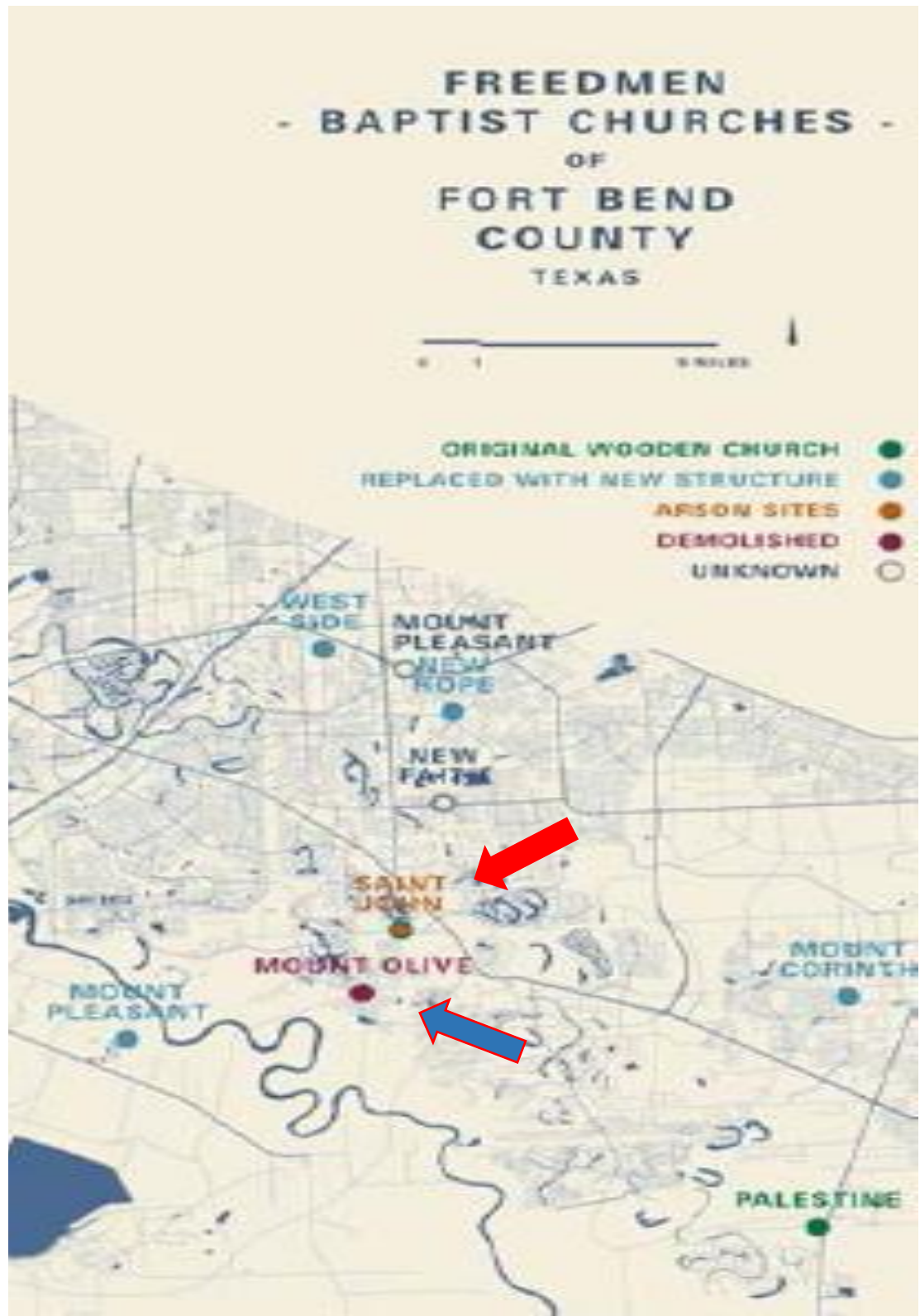


Figure 3.10: Partial map of Freedmen Baptist Churches of Fort Bend County. St. John Property Assessment. Photo courtesy of Gabriel Cuellar.



Top: Figure 3.11: Two women are baptized in a pond near Arcola in Fort Bend County, Early twentieth century. Photo Courtesy of Fort Bend County Archives.



Bottom: Figure 3.12: Congregations look on as newly baptized members walk to shore, early twentieth century. Photo Courtesy of Fort Bend County Archives.



Top: Figure 3.13: Family portrait with matriarch seated in the foreground, early twentieth century. Photo Courtesy of Fort Bend County Archives

Bottom: Figure 3.14: Homestead of African American family in Fort Bend County, early twentieth century. Photo Courtesy of Fort Bend County Archives.



Figure 3.15: African American woman, small boy and dog. Woman is preparing food outside her home in Fort Bend County. Early turn of the twentieth century. Photo Courtesy of Fort Bend Archives.

Tools of Privilege: The County Archive as Contested Terrain

This section surveys the various methods utilized by FSJC including the analysis of three deeds that aided in drawing out the significance of the church. After hearing from other congregates that the church was held under an occupancy deed, Deacon Gerald Rivers visited the county clerk's office to obtain copies of the documents.²⁸⁵ Initially, the hope was the county clerk's office would hold some formal record of the church and its activities.²⁸⁶ Because the church resides on property once owned by prominent white families in Fort Bend County, Rivers hoped that there would be some reference to the church in the records. After several attempts, Rivers emerged with three deeds that begin to shape the historical narrative of St. John's early history.

In the 1890s land around St. John changed hands, this time to the Dew family who bought the 1,000-acre plantation from their uncle, Hugh Saunders. To date, no historical documents in the Fort Bend archives have been found that outline the original arrangement between the Dew family and the church or the sharecroppers living on the land at the time. It has been offered, though not confirmed, that the Dew family wanted the original acre St. John resided on to round out their property lines and suggested a new two acres for the church.²⁸⁷

The first deed is handwritten and dated January 25, 1900. The deed outlines the formal agreement between land owner Anna W. Roberts (Anna Wigglesworth Cartwright Roberts) of Kaufman County, Texas and St. John. It states St. John's Board of Trustees, Jesse Brown, John Fields, Ellis [sic] Daugherty, as well as James Washington and Powell Battle [sic] representing the Board of Trustees for School District #19, paid \$84.50 for a

two-acre parcel of land in the David Bright League (Figure 3.16).²⁸⁸ The land surveyed and identified in the deed as follows:

Beginning at a stake in the West line of the David Bright Survey at N.W. corner of the Mose Brown 40 acre tract same being S.W. corner of the 400 acre tract deeded to Anna W Roberts by Leondae Cartwright:

Thence East along north line said Mose Brown 40 acres 160varas to the stake for corner
Thence North 106 vrs. to stake for corner;
Thence Wes 160 vrs. to stake for corner in West boundary line said Bright Survey;
Thence South 106 vrs. Along said W.B. line Bright's Survey to place of beginning, at 106 vrs., containing two acres of land.²⁸⁹

In establishing the school on St. John's property, Fort Bend County absorbed the town of Dewalt in its service area. By 1893, Fort Bend County was in compliance with the Texas State School Law of 1884 with schools defined by districts; this would have included the St. John School District #19. Other schools included were New Hope, listed as school number 4 in district 19, Mount Olive, listed a school number 2, and Bethel, categorized as school 2, as well as a fifth "Colored" school, which appears in the records as # 1 and # 5.²⁹⁰ District 19 was predominantly one-room African American rural schools.²⁹¹

From the 1900 deed we can glean St. John had selected a board of trustees from the male leadership of the church to represent their interests within the school district. The deed also infers that the school was already in operation prior to 1900. This is most evident through the occupancy stipulation outlined in the handwritten deed. The deed states, "said land to be used for church purposes and school purposes and it is understood and stipulated that in event said premises shall ceased [sic] to be used for school and church purposes then the said premises shall revert to the grantor herein."²⁹²

Anna M. Roberts
 To: D. D. D.
 J. B. Brown et al. Trustees
 St. John The Baptist Church, Colored.

The State of Texas } Know all men by these Presents
 County of Kaufman } That I, Anna M. Roberts a feme
 sole of the County of Kaufman, State of Texas, for
 and in consideration of the sum of Eighty and four \$
 84.00 Principal and interest, Dollars, to me in hand
 paid by J. B. Brown, John Fields, and Eliza Daugherty
 Trustees of St. John Baptist Church, Colored, and James
 Washington and Powell Battle as Trustees School District
 No. 19 of Fort Bend County Texas the receipt of which is
 hereby acknowledged have granted, sold, conveyed
 and by these presents do Grant, Sell and Convey unto
 the said J. B. Brown et al. Trustees of St. John Baptist
 Church, Colored, and James Washington et al. Trustees School
 District No. 19 of the County of Fort Bend in the State of Texas
 all that certain lot, tract, or parcel of land described
 as follows: a part of the David Bright L. & L. survey
 in Fort Bend County Texas described as follows:
 Begin at a stake in the West boundary line of the
 David Bright survey at N. W. corner of the Moss
 Brown 40 acre tract same being S. W. corner of the
 400 acre tract divided me by Leonard Cartwright.
 Thence East along north line said Moss Brown
 40 acre 160 varas to stake for corner Thence North 106° 00'
 to stake for corner Thence West 106° 00' to stake for corner
 in west boundary line said Bright survey Thence
 South 106° 00' along said N. W. line Bright survey
 to place of beginning at 106° 00' containing 2 acres of
 land: Said land to be used for church purposes
 and school purposes and it is understood and stipulated
 that in event said premises shall cease to be used
 for school and church purposes then said premises
 shall revert to the grantor herein her heirs and assigns
 up to the trusts thereby become vested in grantor her
 heirs or assigns.

To Have and to Hold the above described premises
 together with all and singular the rights and
 appurtenances thereto in anywise belonging unto

STATE OF TEXAS
 COUNTY OF FORT BEND

I, Dianne Wilson, County Clerk of Fort Bend County, Texas, do hereby
 certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy as the same appears
 on file and recorded in the appropriate records. Note: A portion of a
 personal identifying number may have been redacted as allowed by law.



Dianne Wilson
 Dianne Wilson, County Clerk
 Fort Bend County, Texas
 January 22, 2013

Figure 3.16: 1900 St. John deed outlining stipulations of purchase. Photo courtesy of the author.

Finally, the deed specifically identified the successors of the grantor and grantees (i.e. the future board representatives from St. John and the county district and the heirs of Ms. Roberts respectively) are responsible to uphold the conditions and stipulations “outlined herein.” On page two the deed states,

“St. John Baptist Colored and James Washington and Powell Battle Trustees of School District No. 19 of Fort Bend County Texas in trust for the use of the above stated and their successors in Trust on the condition above set forth and stipulated. And I hereby bind my heirs executives and administrators to warrant and forever defend all and singular the said premises unto the said Jessie Brown et als Trustees as aforesaid and James Washington trustees as aforesaid and their successors in Trust against every person whomsoever lawfully claiming or to claim the same or any part thereof...”²⁹³

Under this occupancy deed, Roberts and her heirs would retain legal rights to the land. There was no mention, in the 1900 deed or either of the 1935 deeds, of St. John *owning* the property it sits on but rather to simply *occupy* the land. Perhaps Roberts believed offering an occupancy deed gave some level of protection for St. John in that its sustainability was rooted in its purpose. The deed provides for the further protection and continued use of the property so long as St. John remained a spiritual and educational center. I find this the arrangement unusual, considering there *is* evidence of one of the listed St. John trustees, John Fields, owning property in the area. Fields is identified on an undated property assessment from Fort Bend County as owning forty acres of land on the David Bright League valued at 600.00 dollars (Figure 3.17).²⁹⁴ Fields is also listed as owning one wagon, valued at 15.00 dollars, 3 horses or mules valued at 75.00 dollars at 1 cattle valued at 10.00 dollars.²⁹⁵

29	Figgins Frank						
30	Fields John	13	D Bright	40	600		1 15
31	Fields John A						1 15
32	Parr S M						
33							

Figure 3.17: Undated Property Assessment records show John Fields owned property in Dewalt. Photo Courtesy of Fort Bend Archives.

Juxtaposed to the 1900 deed, the property assessment suggests Fields was a leader in Dewalt's African American community. His ability to navigate the system of structural inequality is suggested by his property ownership and service to St. John as trustee.

Two additional deeds were signed by the St. John trustees, one dated November 25, 1935 and the other on December 4, 1935. The first was a \$1.00 sale to George L. Dew for the 1900 property by St. John pastor Rev. Reddick Edwards, and trustees Mack McCoy, Frank Roberson, Malachi Woods, and David Roberson. The location of the land is similarly described in the 1900 deed as follows:

Beginning at a stake in the West line of the David Bright Survey at N.W. corner of the Mose Brown 40 acre tract same being S.W. corner of the 400 acre tract deeded to Anna W Roberts by Leondae Cartwright:
Thence East along north line said Mose Brown 40 acres 160varas to the stake for corner
Thence North 106 vrs. to stake for corner;
Thence Wes 160 vrs. to stake for corner in West boundary line said Bright Survey;
Thence South 106 vrs. Along said W.B. line Bright's Survey to place of beginning, at 106 vrs., containing two acres of land.²⁹⁶

The November 1935 deed requires any structures on the property be excluded from the sale, and should be removed by the congregation within 90 days.²⁹⁷ The deed states that the four trustees were authorized to act on behalf of the church by "a vote and resolutions carried by a majority of the members of the church."²⁹⁸ The deed further states, "the above described premises, together with all and singular the rights and appurtenances thereto in anywise belonging unto the said George Dew, his heirs, and assigns forever."²⁹⁹ This rhetoric identifies that the land is granted contingent on St. John conducting church services and keeping the segregated school in operation.

The second deed was the \$1.00 sale by George L. Dew, just three weeks before his death, of a new square-shaped, two-acre property parcel at an angled intersection of two roads, to St. John Colored (sic) Baptist Church. The deeds and sales of both deeds

stipulated continued occupancy requirements and the surface property would revert back to the grantor. The December 4, 1935 deed between George Dew and St. John describes the new tract of land as, “two acres in the form of a square located in the Southeast corner of the William Stafford League in Fort Bend County, Texas, facing the rock road now running along the South boundary line of said League.”³⁰⁰ It explicitly states only the “surface rights”³⁰¹ to the church and its successors for use as church premises.³⁰² If, according to the deed, “said premises are not used for said purposes, or if used and thereafter abandoned for religious purposes, then said promises herein granted are to revert to the grantor.”³⁰³ This occupancy deed guarantees St John access to the land so long as the site remains a meeting ground for religious purposes. It is with this comprehension of the deed, that the church continues to hold services, rain or shine, on its current location. In other words, though the church owns the building, it only *occupies* the land.

Comparing the 1900 and 1935 deeds supports the claim that the church was a vibrant part of the local African American community since its founding. The deed includes the same language and phrasing that outlined the limits of the purchase. “Said land to be used for church purposes and school purposes and it is understood and stipulated that in event said premises shall ceased to be used for school and church purposes then the said premises shall revert to the grantor herein.”³⁰⁴ This language suggests two points: first, by 1900, a school was established at St. John. The school was prominent enough for inclusion into the Fort Bend County school district plan. Had St. John’s school been smaller or more outlying, closure or consolidation would have been its fate. The volume of students served at the little school is substantiated by school report

found in the Fort Bend Museum archives, which I will address in greater detail later in the chapter.³⁰⁵ Secondly, the deed places strict stipulations on the *types of activities* that are approved by the grantor of the land. The early 20th -century institution of racial segregation deemed it necessary and justifiable to control the physical, social and cultural landscapes of African Americans. It is noted that the Board of Trustees agreed to only use the land for “church purposes and school purposes.”³⁰⁶ Often when discussing the ways in which deed restrictions affected African Americans, scholars focus on exclusion *from* properties and not restrictions *on* properties.

Although these very early attempts to uncover the church’s history only produced three initial documents, the deeds were useful in contextualizing St. John’s unique relationship to the owners of the property and the land itself. They assisted in substantiating the oral history testimonies that suggested, but could not prove, St. John was held under an occupancy deed. The deeds provided a starting point to research additional names, landmarks and property owners in Dewalt at the turn of the century. Because the fire had damaged most of the church’s documents, the deeds served as a starting point in conducting further archival research. Without the deeds, we were left with mainly nicknames and second guesses when it came to the early history of the church. Reverend Gerald Rivers has taken an active role in research and preservation initiatives at St. John. His willingness and persistence in securing the deeds from the county clerk’s office initiated an in depth archival research project that ultimately helped Friends of St. John to construct the significance argument for the historical marker application.

Two additional archival gems that helped contextualize the period between 1900-1953 are an oral history collected by the county from former St. John member D.C. Pickett and a scanned copy of a 1953 anniversary program. Each provided a snapshot into the everyday experiences of St. John's members and the connectedness of the congregation during this era. While the archives that each originated from is vastly different (one from the county and another among the documents in a source packet provided to me by the church secretary), each source represents a critical piece in the process of piecing together St. John's story.

D.C. Pickett was interviewed on March 2, 2013, as part of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission oral history project. Born on January 26, 1936, in Dewalt, Pickett recalls growing up working as a sharecropper on the Dew planation.³⁰⁷ An excerpt from his oral testimony is included in its entirety in order to demonstrate how the memory of St. John is intertwined with the connectedness of the people, church anniversary celebrations and food. The excerpt reads as follows:

KELLY: Were your parents religious?

PICKETT: Oh yeah, very religious. We went to St. John Baptist Church right there in DeWalt.

KELLY: Tell me about that church.

PICKETT: It was a small church, but everybody went together. I'd wait until they had the anniversary and that's when they had the home cooked meals—the home cooked pies and cakes and chicken. Oh man, it was nice! I was junior deacon in the church. It was small, but I was a junior deacon. On Tuesdays, I would open up the services. It was nice.

KELLY: How many days a week would they meet?

PICKETT: Tuesday and Sunday

KELLY: Most people work six days a week didn't they? So Sunday was your day off. What would be a typical Sunday for you and your family?

PICKETT: Sunday – day off! We’d go fishing or go to the creek or a bar-b-que or something like that after church. Lots of times the church had something on Sunday like a bazaar or something.

KELLY: It was your social center. Everybody that went to the church, were most of them from the Dew Plantation or were there other people that came?

PICKETT: Most of them were from the Dew Plantation. My mom she called that the Sabbath day and you’d do nothing but go to church. You didn’t cut no yard or nothing like that. No work on Sundays.

KELLY: How long would you be at the church on Sunday?

PICKETT: My dad would be there all day because he would go to Sunday school. I would just go to church in the evening. If they were having some special thing, we’d be there all day long. Most of the time it was just a couple of hours. But if they were having something and some other churches come over there and visit they’d be all day long. They’d have three or four different preachers there. It was a small church and everyone was together.³⁰⁸

For Pickett, the small size of the church also helped to build the sense of belonging amongst the members. He uses phrases such as “It was a small church, but everyone went together,” “It was small,” “It was nice” and “It was a small church and everyone was together”³⁰⁹ to describe the community of St. John. For special events, the church would host a bazaar or invite other congregations from around the county. This must have made the little church feel cramped at times, but also full of love and laughter. Pickett states, “But if they were having something and some other churches come over there and visit they’d be all day long. They’d have three or four different preachers there.”³¹⁰ He describes the food at the anniversary celebration recalling, “I’d wait until they had the anniversary and that’s when they had the home cooked meals—the home cooked pies and cakes and chicken “Oh man, it was nice!”

A 1953 church anniversary flier alludes to the measure of popularity St. John’s anniversary celebrations would garner. It also points to the network of churches that St.

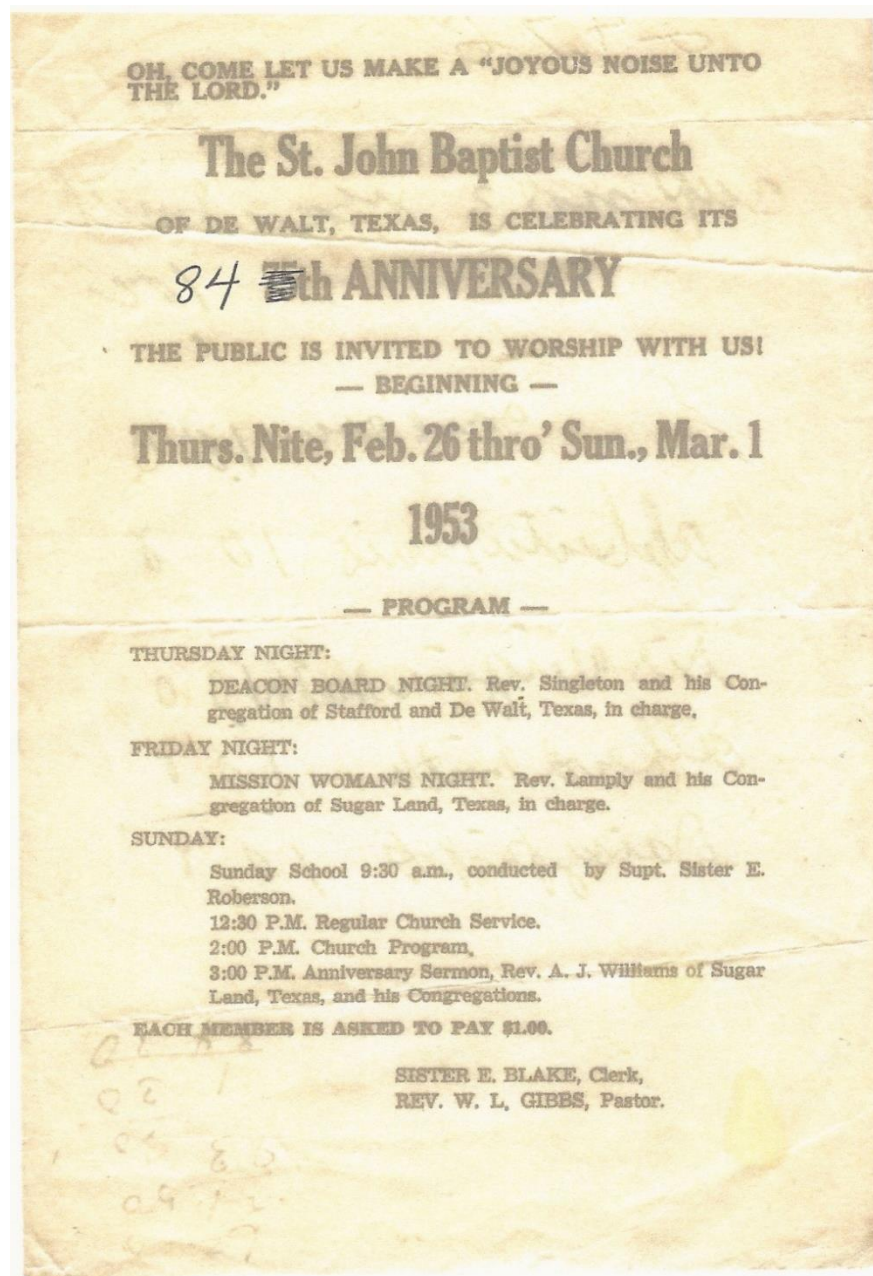


Figure 3.18: A 1953 Anniversary flier. Note the written in change of date. Originally there was uncertainty of when the church was founded, even by early congregates. Scanned copy courtesy of St. John Missionary Baptist Church Archives.

John was part of during the 1950s (Figure 3.18).³¹¹ Notice the flier only mentions the pastor's names from the visiting churches and not the church congregations themselves. This suggests Reverends Singleton, Lamplly and A. J. Williams were well known in the African American spiritual community in Fort Bend. So much so in fact, it was the name

recognition of the pastors and not the church that enticed guests. Similarly, when juxtaposing the flier to the oral history of D.C Pickett one can glean the volume of food that must have circulated during this three-night celebration. Various “home cooked pies and cakes and chicken,” prepared and brought forth by African American women from the furthest corners of the county, was more than just the evening celebratory meal. As such, food is situated in Pickett’s memory as an integral part of the anniversary tradition. For Pickett to draw upon this particular aspect of cultural memory suggests food was as much a part of the church anniversary celebration as the sermon.

I am reminded, from these examples, of Psyche Williams-Forsen’s scholarship in *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*. In chapter five, “Say Jesus and Come to Me: Signifying and Church Food,” Williams-Forsen writes, “we can see how black women extend their realization of self to the domain of the church kitchen and cooking for church activities...Many black women seized this opportunity and used the church as a site to display their culinary skills, expand how they identified themselves, and contribute to African American cultural production.”³¹² The memories of St. John that Pickett describes ties foodways and communities together through the yearly anniversary celebrations at the church. The signifiers embedded in the anniversary celebration at St. John and the food relates to Williams-Forsen notion that suggests, “the tradition of ‘church food’ and particularly the presence of chicken speak to the importance of the food event as central to many black church experiences.”³¹³ In this way, St. John’s yearly anniversary celebration serves as a cultural signifier and site of cultural production.

The Pickett oral history and the 1953 flier opens the world of women’s work in church settings, suggesting women take an active role in the maintenance and

sustainability of the St. John community. Women's preservation efforts then, become a necessary site of analysis precisely because much of their labor is behind the scenes or invisible. These hints of women's work (through the production of food or serving as church clerk as identified on the 1953 flier) provide an inroad into the next section of this chapter. From the beginning of my tenure as volunteer researcher with St. John, the women of the congregation aided in the process of identifying and collecting pertinent information regarding St. John's history for their personal archives. Some women lend themselves in service visiting the Fort Bend County Archives to retrieve scans of school records. Others gave oral histories and helped me identify the chronology of pastors who led St. John. Despite all those efforts, these women preferred to take a behind the scenes role when it came to the public face of preservation at the church.

In the next section, I will examine the role women played in preservation activism for St. John. The women in the congregation did most of the personal archive collection and worked collaboratively to provide source packets for me. Coincidentally, even though the women did most of the legwork of research, it was the men who took the leading role in fundraising and were the public face of the preservation efforts.

Women in Action, Men in the Field



Figure 3.19 a & b: Ms. Irene Hayes, Oral History Interview October 31, 2014. Photo courtesy of the author.

St. John women make up forty percent of the fifteen-person congregation, and play a big role in shaping the historical narratives of the church in the public sphere. This section highlights the efforts of two congregation women who contributed to the construction of St. John's archives. Sisters in Christ Rosa Graves' and Irene Hayes' preservation efforts were shaped by the traditional gendered roles pervasive in the African American Baptist church. As the current church secretary, Graves took an active role in recovering church history, but was hesitant when asked to share her expertise publically during fundraising events and anniversary celebrations. This was, perhaps in part, because of a tradition that still resonates in many African American Baptist

churches; men take the leading role in matters concerning the public edifice of the church. For example, when media outlets sought to interview congregation members about the history of the church, it was nearly always a male deacon or the pastor that gave the interview. With the exception of an April 2015 letter to the editor authored by Graves, and highlighting the collaborative work of the community volunteers, women labor behind the scenes in St. John's preservation model.³¹⁴ I argue that the congregation ultimately decided to make the face of the preservation efforts the deacons and minister of the church because of the cultural values embedded in the Baptist tradition. When the letter to the community was sent out to Fort Bend residents, the obvious choice for the public voice was Brother David Fisher, the Pastor of the church.

The dynamics of African American Baptist church culture are well documented throughout oral history testimonies and academic scholarship. In *Freedom Colonies*, Thad Sitton and James Conrad note that,

“...Baptist churches had full congregational autonomy. Seven member ‘deacon boards’ governed policy at Baptist churches—hiring and firing ministers, regulating Sunday schools, watching over church finances and deciding thorny issues like the ‘de-churching’ of members of the congregation for wayward behavior. Deacons were always men, although behind the scenes and working through various clubs and missionary society’s [sic] women ran most of the day-to-day business of the church.”³¹⁵

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham comments on this trend in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, stating “Black Baptist churchmen certainly recognized the importance of women’s active support for the denomination’s efforts toward racial self-help and self-reliance. Yet male-based traditions and rules of decorum sought to mute women’s voices and accentuate their subordinate status vis-à-vis men.”³¹⁶ This 19th and early 20th -century practice of focusing on male fortitude in the public sphere is itself an act of resistance. In a society that denied African

American men access to the public sphere, the church offered a site in which men could exercise citizenship, leadership and power. In the Baptist church, positions of power were monopolized by men. However, as Higginbotham notes, “women sought to develop their own voice and pursue their own interests, which at times overlapped and at other times contested the men’s. Rising gender consciousness was part of a complex of ideas that informed black Baptist denominational work as a whole.”³¹⁷

Presently, St. John women make up a significant portion of the congregation, taking on leadership roles in the church by serving as church secretary, leading Sunday school, and organizing church events where food is central to the celebration. However, it is the men who are the face of the church’s preservation efforts in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the women’s behind the scenes leadership and collaborative efforts in constructing the historical legacy of the church is poignant. I argue, that an analysis of the role St. John women play in shaping the historical narrative of the church reveals the social issues at the site of gender that are embedded within the organizational preservation efforts. I borrow Higginbotham’s concept of “public religion” here, to consider the “public character and role of the black church.”³¹⁸ Historic preservation then, becomes an emancipatory public discourse in which African American women can shape the public character and historical legacy of the church without actually being held in the spotlight of the public sphere in the process. In this way, their activism pays homage to the traditions of the church, but also, these women are able to connect their spirituality and dedication to the church integrally with social activism.

This phenomenon comes into focus when examining the secretarial work of Sister Graves. When I was initially commissioned to write St. John’s history, Sister Graves was

pivotal in helping me establish the chronology of the church. She warned that our task would prove difficult due to the fire in 2006 that claimed most church records housed in the fellowship hall and pastor's study. Long before any of the other congregation members were comfortable enough to share their experiences with me, Sister Graves opened her personal archive to me; she coached me on how to approach certain members of the congregation for information.³¹⁹ We therefore had to construct the majority of the church's history from personal archives, oral history testimonies, public records and newspaper articles.

In shifting through Graves's personal archive, I found that many of the documents speak to the strong traditions within the church. These traditions are steeped in the practices of the black Baptist church and create a sense of belonging that spans across time and place. A batch of stapled resolutions in my first packet bears testament to these traditions. Sister Graves's attached personal note reads, "Portia, this is one of our black Baptist traditions; giving a statement of our resolve to support and comfort families of the deceased. I have indicated on reverse of each if they were members @ time of death (m) or previous members (pm)."³²⁰ Among these resolutions, are the resolves of Lorraine Martin (pm), Lillian Ann Walker (pm), Malachi Woods Jr (pm), Lillie Brown (m), Lillian Augustine Hayes (m), Carlos Pickett (m), and Alberta Davis (m).

Graves recognizes the poignant tradition in funeral resolves. She identifies their role in providing support for grieving families, but also, in establishing a sense of belonging for remaining members of the church. In identifying the deceased as a member or previous member at the time of death, she also alludes to the idea that belonging is not contingent on current attendance or physical presence, but rather, a collective sense of

belonging across generations of congregates.³²¹ The tradition of funeral resolutions therefore, provides a fundamental example of how community belonging is reinforced during times of trauma. In keeping these resolves and including them in the documentation packet, Graves is acknowledging their centrality in the St. John funeral tradition.

As I continued to work with Sister Graves and be visible in the church community, other women began to come forward and provide document packets as well. On my monthly visits to the church, envelopes full of information were usually waiting for me.³²² Neatly packaged and immaculately organized, these documents became the basis of my research when constructing the church history between 1935-1985. While it was generally the men of the church who would publicly distribute the synthesized narrative, it was the women that supplied the pieces of the puzzle to do so.³²³ During document collection one Sunday Sister Graves introduced me to one of the oldest living members of the church, Sister Irene Hayes. She was, at one time, a regular attendee at St. John, but recent health issues made it difficult for her to attend consistently. Sister Hayes was seated on the third pew from the back, waiting for a family member to bring the car around to take her home. She was cordial, but cautious upon our first meeting.

“I’ve heard about you,” she told me. “You are helping the deacons write our history.”

“Yes Ma’am,” I said politely. “I would love to sit down with you sometime and talk about St. John’s history.”

“Maybe some other time dear, I’m in a hurry to get home today.” I was informed by Sister Graves that Ms. Hayes was very private, and would let *me* know when she wanted to talk. After several months of negotiation and rescheduling, I was asked to meet Sister Hayes at her home in Missouri City on October 31, 2014. The interview provided additional information about the interconnectedness of the African American churches in Fort Bend, and the strong sense of belonging that exists within the church today. Sister Hayes resides on a homestead that her husband’s family purchased in the early 1930s. It is inherited property, and has, and will remain in the family. Today, development has encircled it so much that the unmarked gravel road leading to her home is not represented on the map.³²⁴

Born “Irene Woods” and raised in Fort Bend, Sister Hayes has attended St. John all her life and even went to the school housed on site. Her father, Malachi Woods Sr., is listed on the 1900 and 1935 deeds as a trustee of the church. Sister Hayes’s experiences included schooling at Houston’s first African American high school, Jack Yates High. Her most vivid memory of the school, she recalled, was her frustration with changing classes every period. Hayes states, “The thing of it, about the school there... it was it was...we had to change classes. I was not familiar with changing classes. Where we went, everything was taught in one room and then when I had to change classes seven times or what you have you, I didn’t like it.”³²⁵ I found this quite remarkable. Hayes would have had to pass several white schools before arriving at Yates. It seemed to me some frustration would stem from the required thirty-mile trek to get to the one African American high school in the city.³²⁶ Instead, the frustration of being the proverbial “little fish in a big pond” was the real source of annoyance.

Continuing with the interview, Hayes spoke about her family tree, social organizations within the church and her hopes for St. John's future.³²⁷ One social institution presented in Hayes' oral history testimony is the Baptist Young People Union of America (B.Y.P.U). Sister Hayes was an active member in B.Y.P.U. during her teenage years, and gained a sense of group identity from her experiences. The national organization was founded in 1891. Its three-fold agenda encouraged young people to develop "a deeper spiritual life, a more faithful and zealous service, and a better religious knowledge...The young people were to be trained, not to start new missionary agencies, not to cooperate with independent and irresponsible societies, but to reinforce and strengthen in every way possible our great denominational societies."³²⁸

Hayes' participation the B.Y.P.U. suggests participation in the organization had a definite impact on her life. In part, that impact stemmed from the sense of belonging that the organization provided its young members. It also helped to reiterate the church's traditional values and expectations for the next generation of Baptists. Her memories of B.Y.P.U. point to St. John's involvement in the larger Baptist network in Texas to which Houston served as the nucleus. In *The Other Great Migration* Bernadette Pruitt notes that in Houston alone, "some nineteen thousand of the city's thirty thousand African American church members were Baptist, with Baptist congregations comprising 65 percent of the city's African American churches."³²⁹ The sheer volume of Baptist congregations in the city would have made collaboration relatively easy. Antioch Missionary Baptist church, one of the largest congregations and the centerpiece of Freedmen's Town, was the ideal site for church collaboration in the city. St. John

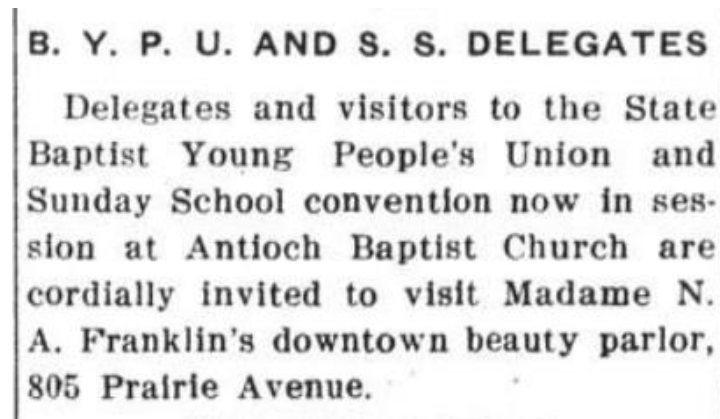


Figure 3.20: Convention Announcement in the *Houston Informer* (an African American newspaper) welcoming convention goers to Houston, 1923. Photo courtesy of The Portal of Texas History.

congregates likely traveled the twenty-five miles to Houston in 1923 when the B.Y.P.U. and Sunday School convention was hosted by Antioch (Figure 3.20).³³⁰

African American Baptist churches provided a site to construct public discourses regarding traditional values in the community. While other national organizations worked for the advancement of the race (NAACP and African American club women organizations), denominational societies such as B.Y.P.U. reiterated the values of the church to the next generation of Baptist congregants. Taken together, Sisters Graves's and Hayes's contributions to the construction of St. John's historical narrative speaks to the traditionally supporting role women take in Baptist church leadership. While it is likely organizations such as the B.Y.P.U. contributed to the conceptualization of the role of women in the church, it is also worth noting Baptist church tradition called upon women to take a supporting role in uplifting the race by uplifting the men. At St. John, these gender roles are neither demanded nor imposed, but rather accepted as each individual's unique contribution to the success of the preservation efforts.

Collaborative Efforts

From the beginning of the FSJC public awareness campaign, media presence and local political support were key components to their efforts. This section examines the public awareness campaigns of FSJC in securing visibility in the public sphere. These efforts were documented through news outlets, newspapers in Fort Bend County and Houston, as well as on the internet. St. John has successfully and effectively instituted a public awareness campaign to keep their vision of preservation alive. Because of their ambitious campaigning, FSJC has secured funding from outside sources and formed a lasting partnership with the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. I argue, one successful strategy employed by FSJC was to utilize the diversity of expertise and resources the core group of volunteers brought to their preservation efforts and couple these with a consistent presence in local media outlets in order to raise awareness of St. John's needs.

One of the earliest efforts by St. John Missionary Baptist church to gain visibility in the public sphere came from a news expose. The local news station, Fox 26, runs a weekly expose called the Isiah Factor.³³¹ In 2012, the Isiah Factor, highlighted the preservation efforts the church pursued since the 2006 fire. In "SAD STORY: FORT BEND COUNTY CONGREGATION FORCED TO ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES IN BURNED OUT BUILDING IN FEAR OF LOSING SANCTUARY!" Pastor Fisher gives a video tour of the damaged sections of the fellowship hall and intact sanctuary. In the video Fisher points to the arson of 2006 and the occupancy deeds as being key components of their church's near a decimated state in 2012.³³² A follow up feature entitled "THE COMMUNITY STILL FINDING WAYS TO HELP ST. JOHN

CHURCH!” sought to spotlight the community engagement with the church after the first expose ran. Local metal detection clubs were able to raise \$580.00 to help St. John’s building fund. One volunteer noted, “We are dedicated to preserving history that would be lost if not for this hobby.”³³³ There was a small surge in community involvement after the second story. Coincidentally, this is the media attention St. John needed to begin their public awareness campaign and recruit long-standing volunteers. Four years later, some of the original volunteers that saw the 2012 follow up feature are board members for Friends of St. John. I will highlight the working relationship between St. John and a few of the core volunteers, before moving on to institutional collaborative efforts St. John has engaged.

In early 2012 a young architectural historian living in the neighborhood surrounding St. John was riding his bike on the trails that crisscross the landscape. Gabriel Cuellar, an emerging professional in the field of historic preservation restoration, was about to ride past the little church when he recalled the news expose from earlier that month. Stopping to get a closer look, Cuellar recognized the immense potential the church had in telling the story of African Americans in Fort Bend county. The church, though severely damaged by the fire, stood in the center of one of the largest master planned communities in the county. A 2014 *Houston Chronicle* article entitled “Church Founded by Freedmen Struggles to Survive” recalls the early contributions of the partnership. Cuellar “got to know the congregation and convinced them that it should be restored to its original historical condition. In a 98-page assessment, Cuellar lays out the historical significance of St. John as an example of a style of church with two steeples unique to black churches built after the Civil War.”³³⁴ Cuellar has been instrumental in

securing a grant from the Texas Sacred Places Project and even constructed a model of what the church renovation will look like for the 145th anniversary celebration. In the four years Cuellar has partnered with St. John, and subsequently FSJC, his expertise has immensely aided in the preservation efforts at the church.

Another key volunteer is Sam Young. Initially, some in the congregation were apprehensive of a middle aged white man taking such a vested interest in the church. Past experiences the congregation shared spoke of broken promises from some whites in the community. The nature of Young's visit was approached with caution. The same 2014 article accounted for Young's service to the church stating,

'One day more than a year ago a white man appeared in the black church. 'I myself was very leery,' said St. John Associate Pastor Forrest Johnson. 'Who are you? Why are you here?' The stranger was Sam Young, sent by the pastor of the Missouri City Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who had heard about the small church's woes. After the initial suspicion, Young has become a fixture at the church and has helped in numerous small ways, including helping acquire new hymnals. 'I love this assignment,' Young said. 'These members of the Baptist church I consider some of my best friends in the world after a year and a half.'³³⁵

Prior to Young's involvement with the church, St. John had little by way of partnerships with any of the megachurches in the county or the Houston area. The contributions Young brought were three fold.

First, the spiritual support of another faith-based institution evoked the power of prayer. In Christian spiritual communities the power of prayer is utilized to call God's will into action. Churchgoers lean on each other for prayer support citing the Biblical teachings in the New Testament as evidence of God's promises to believers. In Matthew 18:19-20 it states, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three

gather in my name, there am I with them.”³³⁶ The joint prayer sessions between the St. John and the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints added additional spiritual support to the community in their time of need. The second contribution was the financial support as a regular contributor to the building fund. Many times over the course of my research St. John received “love offerings” from the members of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints. Monies were used to complete building repairs on the current structure and contribute to the future restoration of the church. Often these love offerings were initiated around specific celebratory programming at St. John such as the Church anniversary, Resurrection Sunday and Men’s Day. They reflect the continued commitment from Young’s church to see the preservation efforts at St. John come to fruition. The third contribution was in kind volunteer services were provided by members of Young’s congregation. These services included printing hundreds of copies of St. John’s letter to the community and pamphlets for the anniversary celebration every year and beautification projects such as planting flowers in the spring and cleaning the church twice a year. These collaborative efforts demonstrate the low cost yet impactful activism that everyday citizens can do to aid in the process of preservation in their community.

Cuellar and Young’s partnership with the church exemplifies the diversity of volunteers serving on the board of Friends of St. John. Their involvement with the fundraising and preservation efforts at St. John have tremendously aided in the continued success of FSJC’s agenda. Additionally, each became involved with St. John by way of the media attention the church first received in 2012. The subsequent volunteers that joined the church’s efforts and make up the board of FSJC include a local real estate

agent, an environmental justice lawyer, two deacons, the associate pastor, the pastor and myself, the historian. Collectively, our efforts have culminated in three successful anniversary weekend celebrations, multiple stories in local newspapers and media outlets, and a feature site for the Fort Bend County Juneteenth celebration. Each volunteer donates in kind services, money and/or time to aid in St. John's preservation. As a grassroots organization with limited resources at our disposal, initially there was a lot of "calling in favors" in order to maintain the visibility of the church and urgency of their cause.³³⁷

Two examples of the network of resources the Friends of St. John organization utilized to aid in the execution of the preservation agenda were the Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) architecture department and the support of city councilmen Jerry Wyatt, congressmen Pete Olson and Al Green. Each of these collaborations further aided in the success of St. John's cause. Furthermore, each represents a successful strategy of collaboration for grassroots organizations seeking to gain more public visibility for their projects. The collaboration between St. John and a historically black university seemed a logical pairing. PVAMU is the second oldest educational institution in the state. It was founded in 1876, and the historical trajectory of St. John and PVAMU are closely connected.³³⁸ In fact, many of the teachers that taught at the St. John school graduated from PVAMU. The African American history and culture embedded in each institution made this an ideal partnership.

Similar to the collaborative initiatives between the Lakeland Community Heritage Project and the University of Maryland, FSJC formed a working relationship with the Prairie View A & M's Community Development Program.³³⁹ The graduate course 5103:

Cultural Heritage Preservation in 2013 provided students with “overview of the professional practice of preserving the cultural and physical heritage of buildings, structures, sites and communities.”³⁴⁰ Though initially planned as an ongoing collaboration with Prairie View’s Community Development Program, their joint project ended after one semester. The proximity to the church (almost sixty miles away) was the leading contributing factor to the abbreviated partnership. Similarly, at the time St. John was in the early stages of preservation planning. The curriculum of the course, at least at the time of collaboration, did not align with the needs of the church. St. John’s most pressing preservation agenda item was acquiring a historic structure assessment in order to apply for a local preservation grant. By comparison, the curriculum in CDC 5103 focused on how planners could integrate community projects already in action. Had the partnership sustained as the LCHP/UMD collaboration did, the possibilities for curriculum development and programming would have increased the visibility of St. John’s cause as well as offered service-learning opportunities for Community Development students at PVAMU.

The second network of resources from which St. John benefited came from the support of District 22 Republican Pete Olson and United States Representative, District 9, Democrat Al Green and Missouri City at Large Position #1 City Councilman Jerry Wyatt (Figure 3.21). Each brought political capital and constituent support to the project. For Olson, his constituency base included prominent Republican donors residing in Missouri City and Fort Bend County. His affiliation with the United Methodist Church brought an added layer of constituent support. Green’s constituency included the Democratic base in Missouri City and Fort Bend County. He served as president of the Houston chapter of



Figure 3.21: Political leaders Pete Olson Al Green and Jerry Wyatt offer joint support for the continued improvement of St. John. February 2015. Photo courtesy of the office of Pete Olson.

the NAACP for ten years and shared his local contacts with the church so as to garner additional financial support. Finally, as a native Texan who can trace his lineage back to the Freedmen living in Galveston and the first Juneteenth celebration, Wyatt brought the preservation fervor to the group. As the only member of the trio to consistently participate in St. John fundraising events and as a standing board member of Friends of St. John, Wyatt was able to provide strategic direction in navigating the politics of Missouri City's preservation scene.

In February 2015 the three politicians attended church service to express their joint support in preserving St. John. A press release from Pete Olson's office included the following quotes from the representatives:

“‘The worshipers and pastors at St. John remain ever faithful and devoted to this church that has been witness to so much Texas and American history,’ Congressman Pete Olson said. ‘It was a privilege to meet with the folks keeping this history and testament to faith alive. I was deeply

impressed with the improvements this community, historic landmark has made and I hope there will be continued support for this church's survival. Missouri City is a better community thanks to places of worship like St John's Church.'

'St. John Baptist Church is a historic institution in Missouri City that has represented unshakeable faith and grace for more than a century,' Congressman Al Green said. 'Pastor Fisher and his congregation have been stewards of the 146-year-old legacy of this church. They have survived and thrived despite the arson at the church in 2006. I, along with many others in our community, wholeheartedly support the St. John Baptist Church. Moreover, we anticipate its continued involvement in our community.'"³⁴¹

Further publicity from the political sphere came in February 2016 at the kickoff celebration for black history month in Missouri City. Councilman Wyatt notes,

Of the five historical sites in Missouri City, two represent our Black heritage.

1. St. John Missionary Baptist Church founded by freedmen in 1869, it is the only historical church in the city.
2. The Freedom Tree; first identified in 1982 with the development of Lake Olympia Subdivision and later became a city park in 1999. It was under this tree where General Gordon Granger arrived from Galveston and read the Emancipation Proclamation freeing the slaves.³⁴²

In June 2015, Councilman Wyatt included a discussion of St. John's preservation efforts into several community outreach speeches he gave in celebration of Juneteenth. His speeches got the attention of Don Smith, Mayor Pro Tem in Missouri City and Chairman of Missouri City Juneteenth Celebration. St. John was integrated into the celebration programming, hosting the Juneteenth Sunday celebration in June 2015.

The collective efforts of Olson, Green and Wyatt illustrate one-way political influence benefits grassroots preservation organizations seeking visibility in their cities. The support of local politicians, particularly through bipartisan cooperation, served as a springboard for additional medial visibility for the church. Friends of St. John successfully partnered with local volunteers, architects, missionaries, politicians and historians to establish a network of resources and generate political capital in the county. Perhaps it is best expressed by Pastor Fisher, in closing this section; "God has blessed us

with so many people who have come along with things we didn't even know about.”³⁴³

In the next section, I will highlight the collective efforts of Friends of St. John and the Fort Bend County Historical Commission chair Bettye Annhaiser, in securing historic designation for the church.

Designating Significance: Understanding St. John’s History through Place-Making

As outlined in the previous section, FSJC’s primary strategy for historic designation was to increase public awareness by garnering support from the Fort Bend Historical Commission and subsequently the Texas Historical Commission. This section chronicles Friends of St. John’s efforts to secure historic marker designation from the state. The Texas Historical Commission (THC) is the statewide governing agency for historic preservation. The commission is comprised of 11 citizens appointed by the Texas governor.³⁴⁴ In order to apply for a historic marker from the state commission, the county commission where the historic site resides must approve the application first. This poses significant problems for marginalized communities in Texas who seek to expose social injustices at the local and state levels.

According to the Texas Historical Commission website, there are eight goals that constitute the statewide preservation plan (Figure 3.22). To directly address goal five, THC rolled out the Undertold Markers initiative in 2006.³⁴⁵ This program promotes topics that directly address the gaps in diversity in the state’s public history narrative. THC established a separate fund and collected through a \$100.00 application fee, to “proactively document significant underrepresented subjects or untold stories.”³⁴⁶ St. John Baptist church submitted an Untold Marker Application in June 2015. I worked with

members of Friends of St. John, Gabriel Cuellar (architectural historian) and Bettye Anhaiser (co-chairman for the Markers Committee with the Fort Bend Historical Commission) to complete the application on behalf of the church.³⁴⁷

Goals

Goal 1: Survey and Online Inventory

Texans undertake a comprehensive survey of the state's diverse historic and cultural resources resulting in a publicly accessible online inventory.

Goal 2: Emphasize Cultural Landscapes

Communities are active in the identification, protection and interpretation of cultural landscapes.

Goal 3: Implement Policies and Incentives

Cities, counties, the state, federal agencies and tribes implement preservation policies and incentives to effectively protect historic and cultural assets.

Goal 4: Leverage Economic Development Tools for Preservation

Communities leverage preservation-based and traditional economic development tools to revitalize historic areas.

Goal 5: Learn and Experience History through Place

Texas residents and guests of all ages learn and experience the state's diverse history through formal education, recreation, and everyday interactions with historic places.

Goal 6: Connect Preservation to Related Fields

We connect and integrate preservation into related fields and activities, building a broader, stronger, and more diverse community.

Goal 7: Cultivate Political Commitment

We cultivate political commitment for historic preservation at the state and local level.

Goal 8: Build Capacity of Preservation Community

The existing preservation community develops its organizational capacity to strengthen and expand preservation skills.

Figure 3.22: THC historic plan. Photo courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission website.

The application consisted of site information, two photos (at least one historical), a well-documented historical narrative, and permission from the property owner for sign placement. The application was scored by the THC Marker committee on seven different scoring criteria of which St. John distinctively met four: “Diversity of topic for addressing gaps in historical marker program; Value of topic as an untold or untold aspect of Texas history; Endangerment level of property, site or topic; Relevance to statewide preservation plan and other THC programs; and CHC support and existing documentation.”³⁴⁸ As outlined in Cuellar’s property assessment map, the church is part of a network of African American churches that can trace its roots back to 1869 (Figure 3.23).

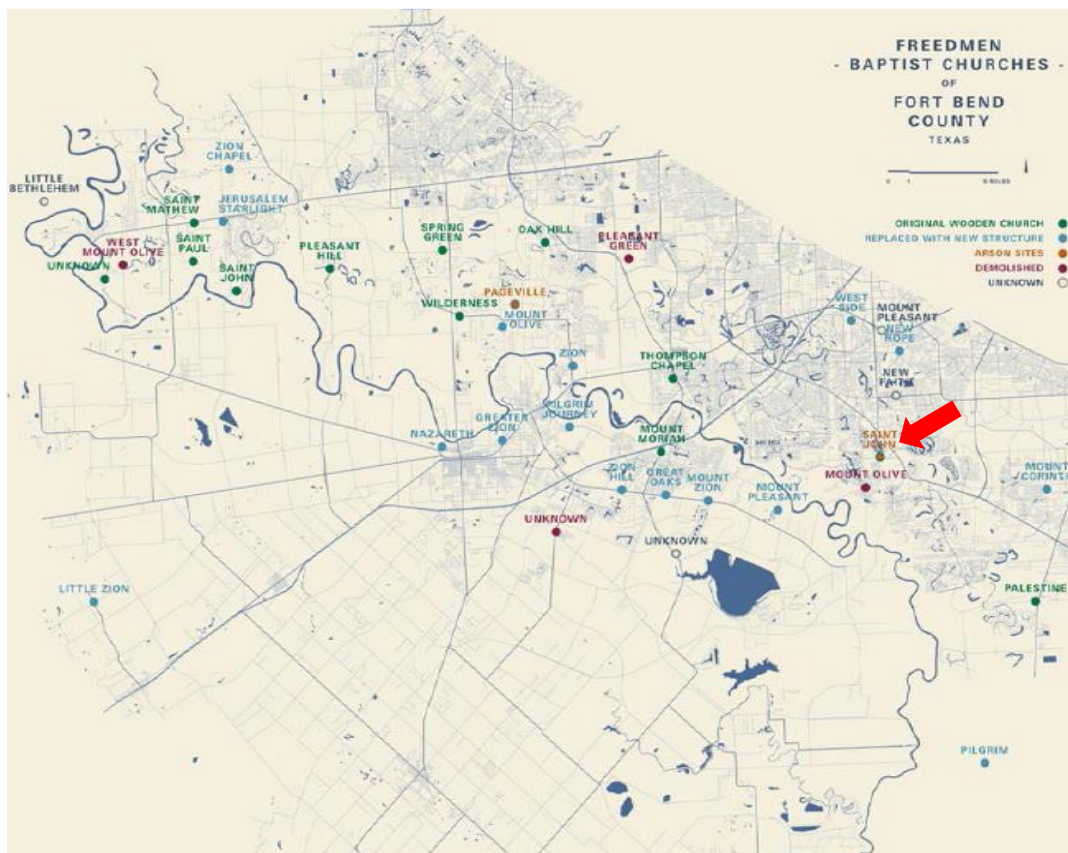


Figure 3.23: Freedmen Baptist Churches of Fort Bend County. St. John Property Assessment, courtesy of Gabriel Cuellar.

The research team felt St. John had a strong case for securing historic designation through the Undertold Marker Program because, as the map suggests, St. John is part of a larger historical narrative that represents the Freedmen experience in Fort Bend County. It also represents one of the only history sites in Fort Bend that speaks specifically to African American experiences. The abbreviated application left much to be desired in crafting the historical significance argument of the church. In August we were informed that St. John was not selected as an Undertold Marker recipient or an alternate for 2015. Though this came as a blow to our confidence on the strength of the application, Bettye was undeterred; she immediately instructed FSJC to prepare a second application for the subject marker application cycle for 2016.

This second application carried four additional criteria, with a maximum point value ranging from five to fifteen for each category.³⁴⁹ This made the chances of selection exponentially harder, but the platform of visibility and of funding resources greatly increased. The additional criteria allowed for an expanded historical narrative (from five to thirteen) and provided a space to develop the contextual framework of the church more completely. The revised thirteen-page research paper included sections of Cuellar's building condition assessment report, my research on the church's early history, and Annhaiser's knowledge of Stephen F. Austin's Old 300.³⁵⁰ The additional contextualization allotted through the expansion of the application connected the metanarrative of Fort Bend County's history to the town of Dewalt, the Dew family and St. John. Each provided supporting evidence for THC evaluators of the network of historical significance of the church.

Tasked with the responsibility of reconstructing St. John's early history, I returned to the Fort Bend County archives to identify sources that could help flesh out the church's role educating African Americans in Fort Bend County.³⁵¹ First, using Freedmen's Bureau records from the Richmond Office (Fort Bend's County seat), I examined the cultural landscape in the county during St. John's early years. Bureau records revealed violence and hostility towards African Americans and concerted efforts by white vigilantes to destroy their newly created social institutions. Though not directly related to St. John's experiences, these documents did shed light on the cultural landscape in the county at the turn of the century.

One particular incident recorded by Captain Rock of the Richmond office was reported in the "Report on the Special Committee on Lawlessness and Violence in Texas, 1868,"

A freedmen's church lobbies for funds through the Freedmen's Bureau. Having already procured 100 dollars in silver, the freedmen continued to fundraise and apply for additional funding to complete their church. As documented in the report, the freed people were holding a fair to procure funds to finish their church, and while they were singing a hymn, two white men rode by and fired their pistols into the church.³⁵²

Rock situates social institutions of African Americans as targets of racial hostility in the county. Accounts such as these fill the pages of the bureau, and paint a lawless, violent picture of Reconstruction in Fort Bend. For example, local histories are quick to point to the Bluejay-Woodpecker battle; a multi-day violent altercation between white democrats in Fort Bend over representation. The battle ultimately led to the all-white primary and is solidified in local lore of the county as the "violence in the name of democracy." Local public discourses of the violence perpetuated against blacks are significantly less visible, in part because it would cast whites in the county as the aggressors and also because many violent acts against African Americans went

undocumented. When incidents of violence were reported, they were often written off as egregious lies perpetuated, as in the case of one *Galveston Daily News* article, as the lies of the Houston newspapers (Figure 3.24).

FROM RICHMOND.

**Freedman Killed—District Court—
Fort Bend County Vindicated.**

[Special Telegram to the News.]

RICHMOND, TEX., Jan. 7, 1878.

To day a freedman, name unknown, who was supposed to be stealing a ride, was run over at Manchester, a half mile east of town. He died after reaching here. He had been riding on a lumber car; the car being switched out he left it and was trying to get aboard the train while in motion, fell between two cars and was run over.

The Criminal District Court is now in session here, Judge Burkhardt presiding. To-day the case of the State vs. James Garvey, for the murder of Henry Sherrard, was tried. The jury decided not guilty without leaving their seats.

In your Houston local of to-day I see Fort Bend county referred to as a murderers retreat. I do not think we deserve this. It is true we have some cases from Harris county, most of which were old and doubtful evidence, or evidence so old and uncertain that we could do nothing but give the accused the benefit of the doubt. Let Houston send us a fresh case with positive evidence and see if he does not go to Huntsville or hang as the case deserves.

Weather very cold and rainy. Planters can do nothing for the present.

Figure 3.24: *Galveston Daily News* article from 1878, denouncing the “murderer’s retreat” moniker given by some Houston newspapers to Fort Bend County. Photo courtesy of Portal of Texas History.

The FSJC committee felt that while including Freedmen's Bureau records in the significance argument was important, they should also focus on the history of the land and community the church built. This provided conceptual distance from associating narratives of white on black violence. Rather, this strategy connected the foundational beginning of St. John Missionary Baptist Church beyond its 146-year history to include a discussion of Mexican Texas, the republic period and early statehood.³⁵³ Because the church still resides within the original David Bright league, it was a strategic advantage to draw attention to the landscape itself as historically significant and worthy of designation. In Texas, a historic site can apply for two types of markers; a subject marker and a land marker. In applying for the land marker, the committee reasoned, the likelihood of that approval increase because the narrative connected the landscape to the history of the Texas republic. By extension, the historic designation would tie the church's land to the 1845 admission of Texas into the union, the antebellum Texas, Fort Bend County during the Civil War, and the Reconstruction south, thus expanding the *geopolitical* context of the landscape in which the church resides.

To do this, the committee turned to historical maps to examine the physical location of the church in relation to the settlement of Stephen F. Austin's Old 300. Stephen F. Austin was one of the first American settlers to bring white settlement into Mexican Texas. There is a longstanding tradition within historic preservation in Texas to highlight the connection of a site or family to Austin or the "Old 300" (i.e. the group of 300 settlers that accompanied Austin to settle in Texas in the 1820s). Settlement concentrated along the bottomlands Brazos River which, in present day Fort Bend County cuts the county nearly in half. The rich banks of the Brazos proved fertile ground

for the expansion of the peculiar institution, and slave ownership was a familiar practice among the settler families.³⁵⁴ Of the 300 migrant families that came to Texas with Austin, David Bright's story is where the historical records intersect with the St. John land. David Bright, a colonist with Stephen F. Austin's Old 300, served as survey chainmen under Horatio Chriesman in 1823-1824 and his service earned him title to a league of land (4,428.4 acres) on the banks of Oyster Creek, a river east of parallel to the Brazos River.³⁵⁵ The ideal location of Bright's league allowed for high profits once the land was broken into tracts and sold throughout the 19th -century.³⁵⁶ In a state where Anglo settlement and early Republic history is highly sought after in the public history sphere, drawing connections through land records between the church's historical narrative to the Old 300 proved a strategic and successful maneuver by the FSJC. It allowed FSJC to establish part of their significance argument on the basis that the church's history actually represented part of the Stephen F. Austin narrative as well.

A second strategic avenue the committee took in building their significance argument was to connect St. John's history to the prominent Dew family in Fort Bend. Sometime between 1890-1891, the Dew brothers settled in Dewalt. The connection between the Dew decedents and the decedents of the church founders is well established in the oral histories of congregation members. Some of the congregation members remember relatives working for the Dew Family in the early 1900s (Figure 3.25). The trajectory of the Dew family estate as compared to that of St. John serves as an example of one way preservation in Fort Bend County which favors a white elitist narrative. The once dilapidated Dew house was moved from its original site (in walking distance to the church) in 2006.³⁵⁷ It was restored to its original grandeur and is now part of Fort Bend's



Figure 3.25 Dew House at the turn of the century. Photos courtesy of Fort Bend Museum.



Figure 3.26: Dew House restored and renamed the Dewalt Heritage Center in Kitty Hollow Park. Photos courtesy of Fort Bend Museum.

Kitty Hollow Park historic plaza. Moving the Dew House to Kitty Hollow Park destroyed the setting and location of the original site, however, the relocation did allow for Fort Bend preservationists to protect the structure against suburban development, the very

treat the St. John faces currently. Significant funding and resources were allocated for the restoration and upkeep of “the oldest and last standing house in Missouri City.”

The Dew plantation house is the site of yearly yuletide celebrations (Figure 3.26).³⁵⁸ The county, along with private donors, put up the funds to move the historic Dew home to Kitty Hollow Park. The Dew plantation house hosts historical tours and public history lectures on the history of the family. The museum exhibits highlight the economic savviness of the family—taking a plantation on the brink of bankruptcy and turning it around during a time of widespread economic depression. In one tucked away corner of the exhibit, the docents have crafted a tribute to Easter, the Dew family’s domestic servant of many years (Figures 3.27). The exhibit narrative is rather one dimensional; the signage states she was a local resident and served the family for “several faithful years.”³⁵⁹ This is the only reference of the people that worked in the house and on the property, with the exception of a few images of convict lease laborers from the Huntsville penitentiary.



Figure 3.27: Dew family domestic worker. Easter is noted as living within the community and oral history testimony confirms she frequented St. John. Photo courtesy of Fort Bend County Archives.

A third strategy included more extensive historical research in the county archives.³⁶⁰ From what I pieced together from this compilation of sources St. John represents the epitome of sustainable social institutions in a black community amid the racialized landscape of the Jim Crow era. As evidenced in the sources, St John was operating as both a school and church from 1880-1932. Before St. John was annexed as part of Missouri City, it was on county maps as the small town of Dewalt. The town of Dewalt, named after one of the areas early planters (Thomas Waters Dewalt), is identified as a predominantly African American community after the Civil War. This brief, one paragraph description of Dewalt in the Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas history (the state official narrative on history across the state) reads as follows:

DEWALT, TEXAS. Dewalt is at the intersection of State Highway 6 and Farm Road 1092, fourteen miles east of Richmond in eastern Fort Bend County. In the 1850s the site was the plantation headquarters of Thomas Waters Dewalt. After the [Civil War](#) the sugar plantation was divided into small blocks, and a predominantly black community grew up there. The town was granted a post office in 1898. The Sugar Land Railroad was built through the community in 1912, and by 1914 Dewalt had a population of 100, two general stores, and a sugar mill. The railroad was abandoned in the 1950s. Dewalt's population was estimated at twenty from 1925 to 1969, forty from 1970 to 1987, and twenty-five from 1988 to 1990. In 1980 the community had a church and a number of dwellings, and by 1990 the city limits of Missouri City had encompassed it.³⁶¹

When Thomas Waters Dewalt died in 1874, he left his estate to his two sons, Daniel and Thomas. The ownership of the land between 1874-1890 is fuzzy, but records of St.

John's presence can be seen through the county school records. A conservative estimate of how long the St. John school serviced the community from 1880 to 1932, with the property the church resides on changing hands at least three times (Dewalt, Cartwright and Dew). An 1881 free school report of St. John listed 89 registered students with 65 in attendance (Figure 3.28). P.H. Collins served as the teacher of the colored school during the ten-month school year.³⁶² The final remarks from Collins' report read: "I have been employed (sic) in the public school work about 4 years and have some experiences of the great work, and can saftly (sic) say that these are a promising pupils"³⁶³

This rare document demonstrates that a colored school at St. John had existed at least as early as 1880, a mere eleven years after the church's documented founding. The 1880 census notes two Woods households are living in the area; Enoch Woods, (illegible) Woods and Greene Woods (elder living with illegible) all having lineage originating in South Carolina.³⁶⁴ These records further substantiate the testimony of Hayes that her lineage dates backs to the early foundational years of the church. Collectively these documents shaped the historical narrative, helping to strengthen the second marker application.

Artifacts in the Fort Bend County
2/19/2014

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FORM D.
REPORT OF PUBLIC FREE SCHOOL OF *Saint John*
School Community No. *11* in *Halt Bush* County, State of Texas, for the
Term commencing *6th* day of *Sept* 188*1* and ending *4th* day
of *July* 188*1*

Total number of Children within scholastic age in School Community..... *89*
Number of Pupils within the scholastic age actually enrolled in school..... *65*
Number of Pupils over scholastic age enrolled in school..... *1*
Number of Pupils under scholastic age enrolled in school..... *1*
Total number of Pupils enrolled in school..... *68*
Total daily attendance of Pupils of scholastic age..... *8,302*
Average daily attendance of Pupils within scholastic age..... *50*
Average daily attendance of Pupils over and under scholastic age..... *2*
General average daily attendance of the entire school..... *about 48*
Number of days school has been taught..... *200*
Number of months school has been taught—estimating twenty days to the month..... *10*
Salary of Teacher per month..... *\$25.00 and \$14.00*
Whole amount paid Teacher from Public School Funds..... *\$3.10*
Whole amount paid Teacher from private funds..... *churn*
Total amount received by teacher for the entire term..... *3.10*
Character of School (Type) (Colored, ~~White~~, Mixed)..... *in a, Bad condition*
Character of School Building, location, etc., private property..... *in a, Bad condition*
Average rate of Tuition of Pupils within scholastic age as per actual daily attendance..... *148*
Average rate of Tuition of Pupils over and under scholastic age..... *55*
Number of Pupils of scholastic age that could not read at the beginning of the term..... *55*
Number of Pupils of scholastic age that cannot now read..... *25*
Number of Pupils of scholastic age that could not write at the beginning of the term..... *6.16*
Number of Pupils of scholastic age that cannot now write..... *about 25*
Number of Pupils of scholastic age that did not understand the four simple rules of Arithmetic..... *65*
Number of Pupils of scholastic age that now understand these rules..... *30*

Number of Pupils that have been instructed in:

Orthography.....	<i>29</i>	Composition.....	<i>18</i>
Reading.....	<i>30</i>	History.....	<i>18</i>
Pennmanship.....	<i>18</i>	Algebra.....	—
Arithmetic.....	<i>18</i>	Geometry.....	—
Geography.....	<i>29</i>	Natural Philosophy.....	—
English Grammar.....	<i>18</i>		

REMARKS:
I have been employed in the Public School work about 14 years and have some experience of the great work, & can safely say that there are a progressing Pupils
I certify, on honor, that the above report is correct.
Prof. R. H. Collins
Teacher.

Figure 3.28: Fort Bend County school records, St. John (Colored) Baptist School, 1881. Photo courtesy of the author.

Reference to the school emerges again in 1897 as part of county district 19 school number 4. The teacher J. H. Yates was paid, according to the county school salary report, \$45.00. It seems that St. John was part of a larger cluster of African American schools in operation between 1897-1905 in the Dewalt area. It included New Hope, also listed as school number 4 in district 19,³⁶⁵ Mount Olive, listed a school number 2,³⁶⁶ and Bethel, categorized as school 2,³⁶⁷ as well as a fifth “Colored” school, which appears in the records as school # 1 and # 5.³⁶⁸ An 1891 *Brazos Signal* newspaper article suggests the network of schools also included a closely connected group of teachers. One of St. John’s teachers, J.H. Yates, is mentioned in the article by name for his attendance and active role in a debate regarding “reading, numbers and grammar.” (Figure 3.29). Similar to other African American professional organizations of the era, the teachers association provided professional development, support, and networking opportunities for its members. This article demonstrates the collective organized efforts of African American residents in Fort Bend to create sustainable educational institutions in the county.

As the African American population in Dewalt continued to grow, so too did the white holdings in the town. In 1898, the town got a post office. It is likely operated out of the general store owned by the Dew family, known as Dew and Hutchins (Figure 3.30). At its height, the store operated with its own currency for the sharecroppers (Figures 3.31a & 3.31b).³⁶⁹ A 1932 map of the Dew Brother’s oil ridge shows the Negro church and school, along with the general store and cotton gin operating on the property (Figure 3.32a and 3.32b).

Fort Bend Negro Teachers,

RICHMOND, Tex., June 30.—The colored teachers of Fort Bend county met on Saturday, June 26, 1891. The house was called to order by the president at 10:30 a. m. Prayer was offered by the president. After calling the roll the minutes of the last session were read and adopted.

Next in order was debate. The subjects that were to be debated were reading, numbers and grammar, by J. H. Yates, Miss Esther Smatten and Mr. L. J. LeQuey and others.

It was moved and seconded that subjects, numbers and reading, would be explained at the next meeting.

It was moved and seconded that a committee of three should be appointed to serve on memorial services by Mr. N. A. Smiley, Mr. L. J. LeQuey and Mrs. M. L. Long.

It was moved and seconded that a special meeting would be held on Saturday, July 4, 1891.

It was moved and seconded that the teachers should continue to meet during the summer.

It was moved and seconded that the meeting would stand adjourned.

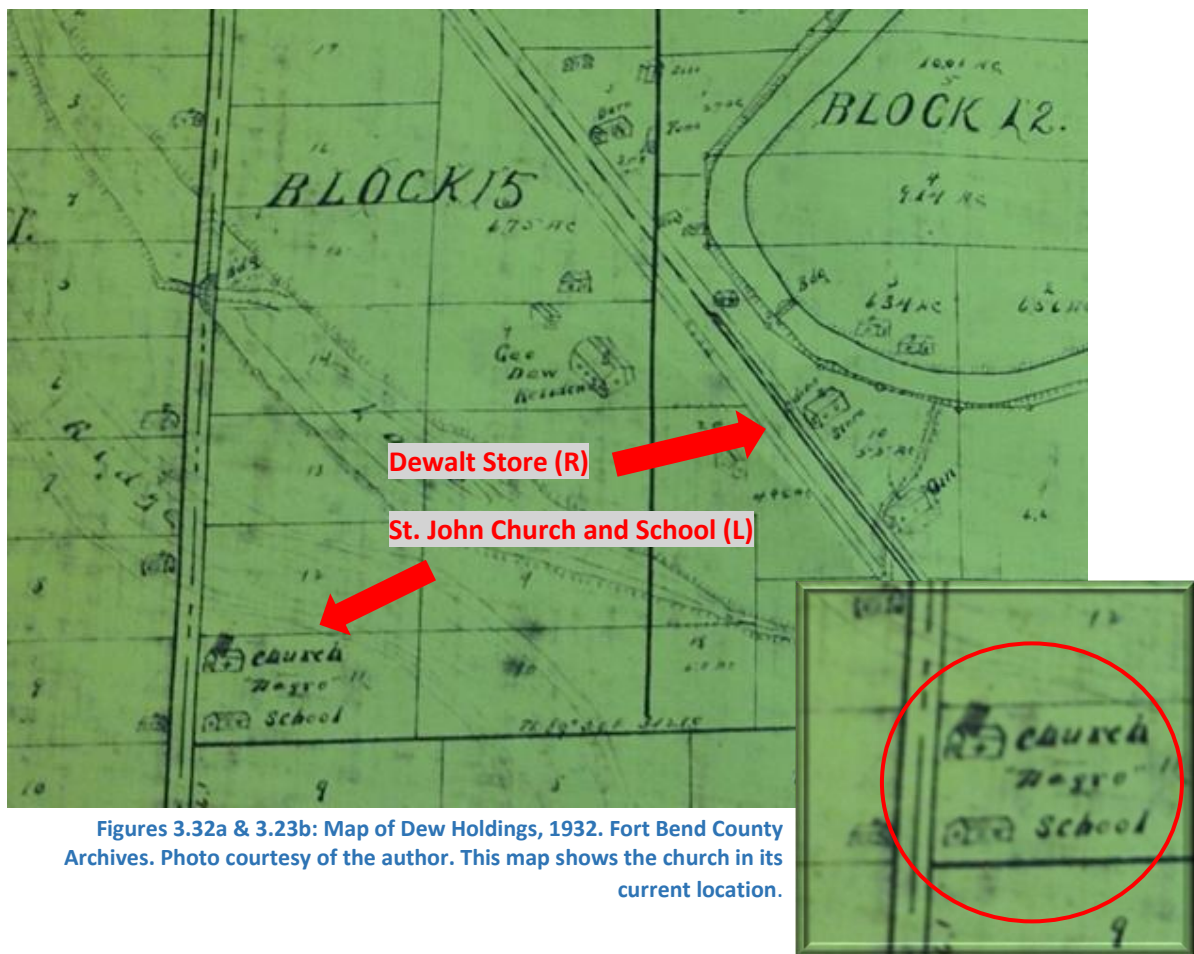
Figure 3.29: 1891 *Brazos Signal* article naming J.H. Yates as an active participant of the Fort Bend Negro Teachers Association. Photo courtesy of Portal to Texas History website.



Figure 3:30: Dew and Hutchins store, turn of the century. Photo courtesy of Fort Bend Archives.



Figures 3.31a & 3.31b: Dew and Hutchins Currency, Fort Bend County Archives. Photo courtesy of the author.



Figures 3.32a & 3.23b: Map of Dew Holdings, 1932. Fort Bend County Archives. Photo courtesy of the author. This map shows the church in its current location.

Collectively, these additional sources allowed me to demonstrate the ways in which St. John serves as a microcosm for the experiences of African Americans across the county during the era of Jim Crow segregation. Upon submission of the application and the conclusion of my research, the Friends of St. John were preparing for another ambitious publicity campaign. I participated in the Juneteenth celebration where I shared a brief history of the St. John community and stressed the importance of saving African American Historic sites (Figure 3.33).



Figure 3.33: Fort Bend County Juneteenth celebration, 2015. Pictured are Deacon Gerald Rivers and volunteer researcher Portia Hopkins. Photo courtesy of the author.

To my knowledge, this was one of the only times a woman affiliated with the church spoke publically about its history.³⁷⁰ The experience of research with St. John taught me that in order to understand the nuances of church preservation, I must first understand the gendered politics at play within the congregation, and by extension, the denomination.

St. John's journey has been a long one. Since its founding in 1869 the church has faced several obstacles and endured many tribulations. The church served as the site of

community building and facilitated a strong sense of belonging amongst congregates. When church records were lost in 2006 due to arson, it seemed as though the little church was going to close its doors forever. The steady encroachment of suburban development and the aging population of the congregation posed additional challenges. Nonetheless, St. John invested in preservation efforts and utilized local archives to reconstruct the church's history. Assistance from a host of volunteers and a growing public awareness campaign allowed St. John to continue its efforts to preserve the rich history rooted in the church. The women of the church played a key role in shaping these narratives, but elected to maintain a supporting role due to traditional norms of gender politics in the Baptist church. The public face of the church therefore remained dominated by the men, despite women reconstructing the majority of the church's history from their personal archives.

In the process of completing this dissertation St. John was awarded a historical marker from the Texas Historical Commission. Not only does the designation allow the church to gain visibility in the public history sphere, it has also generated additional discussion (and funds) from the surrounding community to restore the church. Even with the honorary historic marker designation and the current and growing support from the community, St. John is still not out of the woods yet. As I will demonstrate in chapter four, even historic designation will not stop all threats to the historic fabric of a community on the margins.

Chapter Four: Brick by Brick: Saving Freedmen's Town in the Midnight Hour

"Draw water for the siege, strengthen your defenses! Work the clay, tread the mortar, repair the brickwork!"³⁷¹



Figure 4.1: Close up of Freedmen's Town historic bricks in Fourth Ward, Houston, Texas. Photo courtesy of the author.

This chapter examines the historically African American community of Freedmen's Town, in Houston, Texas. It explores how institutionalized racism in Harris County, Texas shaped the cultural landscape, geographic location and demographic makeup of Freedmen's Town. I evaluate the rhetoric in the 1984 historic marker application to assess how discussions of African American entrepreneurship and prosperity were strategically embedded to connect Freedmen's Town history to the 19th - century economic boom in Houston. The chapter chronicles the preservation practices at work in the community and addresses the ways in which women shape these efforts. It assesses the collaborative initiatives between the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition (FTPC), Rice University and Houston Community College Central. Though Freedmen's Town is included on state and national preservation registries, I argue the rapid growth of urban renewal projects in Houston and the lack of enforcement of preservation policy in Houston has accelerated the deterioration of the historic district. Freedmen's Town is a preservation battlefield. The FTPC is literally in the midst of

litigation to save one of the last and most visible vestiges of the Freedmen community, historic brick paving in the Fourth Ward.

Freeman's Town History

Originally intended in 1839 to divide the city of Houston into four quadrants for the purpose of electing public officials, the Ward system also contributed to the development of settlement patterns along racial and ethnic lines. Freedmen's Town, originally called Freeman's Town and located in Houston's historic fourth ward, was founded by freed slaves in 1866. Bernadette Pruitt writes in *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900-1941*,

“Freedmenstown inside the Fourth Ward, just north of San Felipe Road and west of downtown, especially appealed to newcomers and freedpeople of Houston alike... Situated southwest of Houston's downtown business and commercial district and on the southernmost bank of Buffalo Bayou, Freedmantown continued south of Congress Avenue and west to Main Street. It comprised most of current downtown Houston west of Main, along with neighborhoods on San Felipe (today West Dallas) and Gray Streets.”
372

Figure 4.2 illustrates the original size of the Freedmen's Town community in red, once forty city blocks area with a business district, hospital, library, movie theater and school. It is now a gentrified space with mixed-use condominiums, trendy restaurants and exclusive private schools. The extension of the interstate 45 freeway divided the eastern quadrant of Freeman's Town beginning in 1962.³⁷³ The construction of Allen Parkway along the banks of Buffalo Bayou devastated the northern section of the community. The Figure 4.2 also illustrates where the National Registered Historic District is situated in relation to the historic boundaries of the Freedmen's Town.³⁷⁴ Additional designated sites include historic churches and homes, but to date it does not include specific designation for the brick lined streets or the Gregory School.³⁷⁵

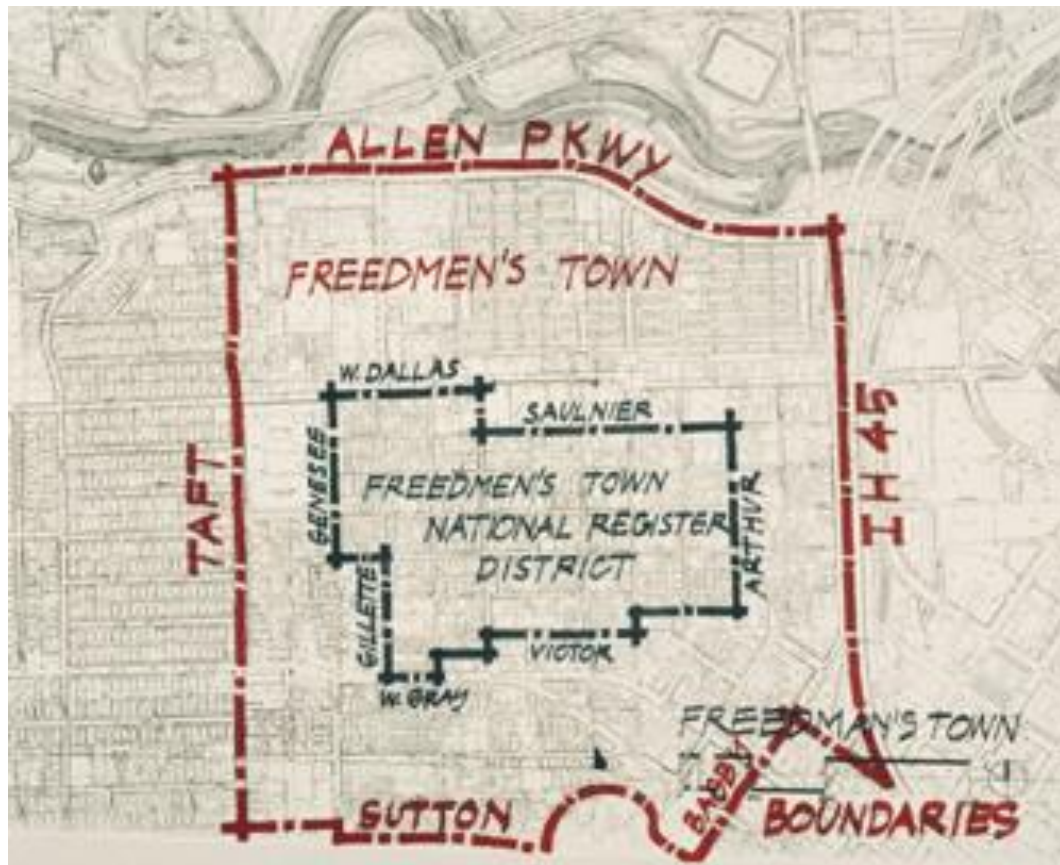


Figure 4.2: Historic Map of Houston with overlay of Freedmen's Town's original boundaries and the boundaries of the national Register Historic District. Photo Courtesy of <http://www.hillswiftarchitects.com/pages/projects/freedmensrmp.html>

African Americans migrated to Fourth Ward's Freedmen's Town as early as 1866. African Americans squatted in small clusters within the flood plain of Buffalo Bayou. By 1870 some had purchased small tracts of land, while others pooled resources to build institutions that would benefit the freedmen community. The same year of Freedman's Town's founding, the Texas legislature passed an updated constitution directly addressing the status of Freedmen in Texas. Article VIII, so aptly called "Freedmen," stated the following;

SECTION 1. African slavery, as it heretofore existed, having been terminated within this State, by the Government of the United States, by force of arms, and its re-establishment being prohibited, by the amendment to the Constitution of the United States, it is declared that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist in this State; and Africans and their descendants, shall be protected in their rights of person and property by appropriate legislation; they shall have the right to contract and be contracted with; to sue and be sued; to acquire, hold and transmit property; and all criminal prosecutions against them, shall be conducted in the same manner as prosecutions, for like offences, against the white race, and they shall be subject to like penalties.

SEC. 2. Africans and their descendants shall not be prohibited, on account of their color or race, from testifying orally, as witnesses, in any case, civil or criminal, involving the right of, injury to, or crime against any of them in person or property, under the same rules of evidence that may be applicable to the white race; the credibility of their testimony to be determined by the court or jury hearing the same; and the Legislature shall have power to authorize them to testify as witnesses in all other cases, under such regulations as may be prescribed, as to facts hereafter occurring³⁷⁶.

The Constitution of 1866 further clarified the limits of participatory citizenship for freedmen in Article III SEC. 5, stating, “No person shall be a representative unless he be a white citizen of the United States, and shall be a qualified elector at the time of his election, and a resident of the State for five years, next preceding his election, and the last year thereof a citizen of the county, city, town or district for which he shall be chosen.”³⁷⁷ A series of black codes soon followed, that limited African American movement and denied them the right to testify against whites in open court.

Nevertheless, the formation of schools, churches, and small businesses that served the newly freed population are just some examples of the ways African Americans exercised their citizenship in the late 1860s and 1870s despite these legislative restrictions. Pruitt notes that, “The Fourth Ward, after the collapse of slavery emerged as a center of hope, development, fresh starts and racial autonomy for freedmen and freedwomen. Former slaves found themselves gravitating to the ward not because of any one attractive measure, but rather because of its close proximity to the Brazos River.”³⁷⁸

Using census and deed records, city documents such as tax rolls and petitions, the Houston Red Book, newspapers articles, church and school records, oral histories and a local history book published by Reverend J.H. Yate's son, grassroots volunteers were able to reconstruct Freedmen's Town early history.

In the formative years of Freedmen's Town development, the community was not included as significant enough, or populated enough for that matter, to warrant street identification on city maps. As early as 1866, an *absence* on the map speaks out for a community on the margins. The historical marker application notes, "A narrow strip of unnamed streets between now what is Genesee, W. Dallas, Andrews, and Arthur streets appear as platted, rectangular blocks in the W.E. Wood Map of Houston. Nevertheless, census records as late as 1880 seem to indicate that this part of the city was still sparsely populated."³⁷⁹ A collection of densely clustered wood-frame houses dotted the landscape going east towards the Houston city center. These homes were mostly representative of the low and middle income renters who lived on the eastern side of Freeman's Town. They are a common architectural type during the late 19th century in emerging freedom colonies across the state and region.³⁸⁰

The shotgun houses, duplexes and two story wood frame houses dating from the turn of the early 20th century to the late 1930s made up the majority of the historic district outlined in the 1984 marker application (Figures 4.3-4.5). These homes are representative of the working class demographic and also represent a site of community building. The front porch is a common feature across many of the shotgun homes. It represents a public space useful in facilitating community building. The majority of the homes included in the 1984 application are documented as having either a front porch or

stoop. This transitional space between public and private spaces served a functional purpose and held symbolic meaning to community members. The nomination form notes,

“this transitional porch space between home and community is, in fact, one of the most salient features of the district. It served, as it does to this day, not only as an adaption to the miserably hot summer climate of Houston, but as a social space for conversing with neighbors and watching the children, who were often forced to play in the streets. Significantly, the porch is usually the only element of the houses that exhibits any architectural pretention.”³⁸¹

In “Toward a Performance Theory of Suburban Ideals” Dr. Mary Corbin Sies investigates “architectural performances within the larger context of the community building process.”³⁸² Sies borrows from the theoretical framework of John Archer, who “explores how specific features and amenities...when physically incorporated into suburban design, served to exemplify and perpetuate specific relations, assumptions, and ideals in Anglo-American culture.”³⁸³ This same theoretical framework is applicable to examining the role porches played in African American working class communities at the turn of the century. In building a sense of belonging within the community, the front porch served as a site of analysis for the community building process. Future research on the space of the front porch in Freedmen’s Town would likely add depth to the significance of the vernacular landscape grassroots activists seek to preserve.

In the 1984 nomination form, the preparers note two scathing truths about the shotgun houses; first, the homes are in disrepair. Many of these homes were not updated throughout the years, in part due to the inability of residents to afford some of the necessary repairs like leaky roofs, rickety plumbing, and foundation problems. Second, most of these homes were rental properties, owned by absentee landlords who did not maintain the property for the tenants. As a result, many of the houses fell into disrepair.

As Houston's city center expanded in all directions, the land the homes sat on became prime real estate, and thus the landlords remained reluctant to sell to black tenants.³⁸⁴



Figure 4.3 (Above): Historic shotgun houses in Freedmen's Town. This image was taken during 1980s. Photo Courtesy of African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.

Above: Figure 4.4: Two story wood frame houses in Freedmen's Town. This image was taken during 1980s. Photo courtesy of African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.





Above: Figure 4.5: Two story wood frame houses in Freedmen's Town. This image was taken during 1980s. Photo courtesy of African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.

During the 1880s and 1900s the community experienced “accelerated” growth, rising from a population of 1,314 in 1870 to 9,397 in 1920.³⁸⁵ African Americans from various surrounding rural and coastal communities migrated to Freedmen’s Town and the sudden population growth points towards the likely availability of job opportunities in Houston’s bustling city center for African Americans. Pruitt notes that, streetcar lines on the “westernmost edge of the present district” and another line running down the main street of the original community and proceeding north represent the movement of people in and through the Freedmen’s Town.³⁸⁶ As the community expanded and began to prosper, a small African American middle class emerged.³⁸⁷ According to oral testimony, influential civic leaders and entrepreneurs like Reverend J.H. Yates and Ned Pullum were some of the earliest freedmen to reach middle class status. Their families are noted as providing small loans and legal support to aid others in purchasing property. In fact, Freedmen’s Town own Emancipation Park was purchased with community funds to commemorate Juneteenth.³⁸⁸ During Freedmen’s Town’s heyday, a burgeoning business class brought much prestige to the community (Figure 4.6).



Above: Figure 4.6: Houston Negro Chamber of Commerce. Located in the business district of Freedmen's Town on 224 West Dallas. Now demolished. Photo Courtesy of the African American Library at the Gregory School.

Further evidence of their status and middle class sensibilities is visibly present in photographs and through the material culture in the preserved home sites (Figures 4.7-4.10).³⁸⁹ Throughout its early history, Freedmen's Town boasted residents who owned law offices and medical practices, headed churches, worked as educators, operated printing companies, barber shops and beauty parlors, owned general stores and provided the community civic services when the City of Houston refused to do so.³⁹⁰ The geographic location of the prominent families' homesteads in Freedmen's Town alludes to their prosperity and social capital in the community. Most families of status lived along the main drag of the community. Though many of the buildings no longer stand that can testify to the prominence of the business class in Freedmen's Town, four prominent structures are represented in the nomination form as contributing to the character of the district; the Yates homestead (Figure 4.7), the Reverend Ned Pullum

House (Figure 4.8), the J. Vance Lewis House (Figure 4.9), and Antioch Baptist Church (Figure 4.10).³⁹¹

As I will outline in the historic marker and collaborative efforts sections, the middle class homes and material culture artifacts found within them, particularly in the Yates and the J. Vance Lewis houses, reveal the middle class distinction of some of Freedmen's Town's most prominent residents. Social and community institutions also made up much of the Freedmen community. By the early 1900s Freedmen's Town had a library, school, several churches, businesses and a hospital.³⁹² Like Lakeland and St. John, the creation of social institutions provided public spaces for community building and identity construction. The construction of the Carnegie Colored Library in 1912 (Figure 4.11) and the Gregory Institute (Figure.12) in 1926 illustrate two examples of community institutions that brought Freedmen's Town residents a collective sense of pride.



Above, Figure 4.7: Jack Yates homestead, House erected in early 1870s. Photo taken in early 1900s. Notice the church immediately to the left and partially out of picture and dirt street, suggesting this image was taken prior to historic bricks laid. Photo courtesy of African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.

Below: Figure 4.8: Ned P. Pullum House. Photo courtesy of African American library at the Gregory School Archives.



Above: Figure 4.9: J Vance Lewis House. Photo Courtesy of the African American library at the Gregory School Archives.

Below, Figure 4.10: Antioch Baptist Church. Image included in 1976 nomination from for National Register of Historic Places. Dated between 1910-1921. Photo Courtesy of Portal to Texas History.

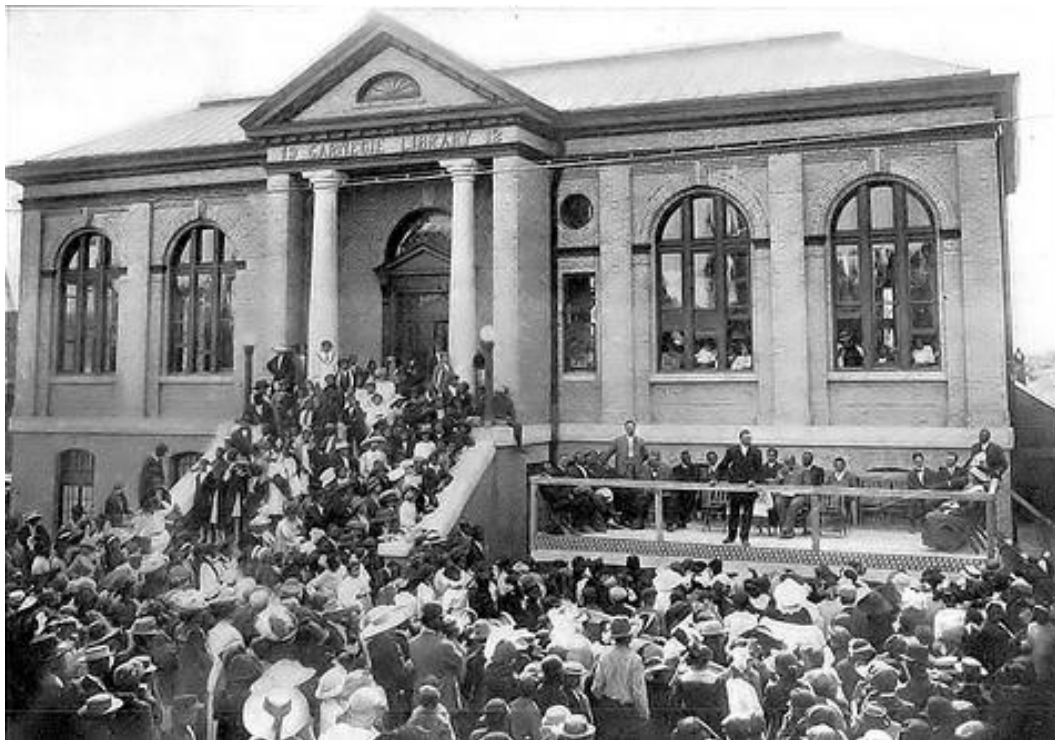


Figure 4.11: Colored Carnegie Library in Freedmen's Town, 1912. Photo part of the Willie Lee Gay Collection at the African American Library at the Gregory School archives.



Figure 4.12: The Gregory Institute opened in 1926. It was the first public school for African Americans in the city. The African American library at the Gregory school now stands on its original site. Photo courtesy of the African American Library at the Gregory School archives.

One of the earliest social institutions in Freedmen's Town was Antioch Baptist Church. Founded by Reverend Jack Yates in 1866, the original congregation met under a brush arbor along the Buffalo Bayou.³⁹³ The church grew in size and influence under Yates's leadership. Land was purchased in what was then the center of Freedmen's Town and a permanent structure was erected in 1879.³⁹⁴ Though the church stands on its original site and continues to provide services for the community, it is separated by Interstate 45, condos, mixed-use development and skyscrapers. What was once the center of Freedmen's Town is now the westernmost tip of downtown Houston.

The prominence of Antioch cannot be understated. It is the first brick structure owned by African Americans in Houston (Figure 4.10).³⁹⁵ Before the Gregory Institute was founded in 1926, Antioch was one of the sites of educational advancement in the community, with a mission of teaching school age children and adults how to read and write. The church provided shelter and food for the poverty stricken and, perhaps most importantly, established a sustainable spiritual community in Freedmen's Town. Coupled with the Gregory Institute, founded in 1926 as the first public school in Houston for African Americans, the church and school are prime examples of social institutions facilitating community building in Freedmen's Town.

The history of Freedmen's Town is not particularly distinctive from other freedom colonies founded across the south after emancipation. Freedmen gathered to establish small self-sustaining communities to start anew. Freedom colonies offered the chance for its citizens to separate from the horrors of their enslaved past. Population growth and opportunity bred a new African American middle class as the 19th-century drew to a close. As African Americans developed a new sense of collective identity they

built community institutions that facilitated the process of identity construction. The church and school became the center of the community's public discourse of identity. The front porch of the neighborhood's homes offered an additional, and informal, site of community building. In the next section, I will analyze the 1984 National Register of Historic Places nomination form to determine how vernacular landscapes, middle class home sites and social institutions contributed to the significance argument. Collectively, these three sites of preservation offered the nomination form preparers multiple platforms in which to construct their significance argument.

The Freedmen's Town Historic Marker Application

The advantage that Freedmen's Town has over both Lakeland and St. John is their historic designation on the National Register of Historic Places. According to the National Trust for Historic Places website, in order to be listed on the National Register a property must have the following:

- Must be at least 50 years old and retain their historic character.
- Be associated with important events that have contributed significantly to the broad pattern of our history.
- Be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represent the work of a master; or possess high artistic values; or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- Have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Besides meeting one or more of these National Register criteria, a property must also have integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. This means that if a property has been dramatically altered or its setting has been lost, it is probably not eligible for the National Register.³⁹⁶

Freedmen's Town received its National Register designation in 1985. This section evaluates the 1985 historic marker application and considers the ways in which the

description and significance sections of the application allowed the preparers to draw connections between Houston's more visible historical narratives and Freedmen's Town.³⁹⁷ The significance of the community is highlighted throughout the application, and the preparers tie Freedmen's Town to the deeper history of Houston's founding and the early republic. The applications notes, "The city of Houston, which was founded in 1836, six months after General Sam Houston's victory over Santa Anna at the battle of San Jacinto, has always had a significant black population. Built on swampy terrain along Buffalo Bayou, the original town site was cleared by black slaves and poor Mexican laborers."³⁹⁸ Through slave labor, whites controlled the economy and blacks powered it; the cotton and sugar economies helped build the city. The application stresses the centrality of the African American presence during Houston's founding.³⁹⁹ It connects Freedmen's Town's development and growth with Houston's economic boom during the late 19th century. Finally, the preparers highlight the self-sustaining aspect of the community through a discussion of the community's social institutions such as the church, school and business district.⁴⁰⁰

I argue that in relating Freedmen's Town's history to larger more visible narratives about Houston's history, the preparers strategically placed the historic district within a context that legitimized their claim of historical significance. This strategy included a connection to the economic success of some residents in the community as well as a fruitful discussion of the sustainable institutions within Freedmen's Town. In section seven (Description) and eight (Significance) of the application the preparers included thirty-seven pages contextualizing Freedmen's Town in which the entrepreneurship of the communities' founders and the self-sustaining community model

they championed is situated amidst the Jim Crow landscape of Houston's economic development. In appealing to a wider audience, one aspect of their strategic approach included a discussion of the realities of a segregated society. Though segregation created a nervous landscape, it also created distinct economic markets in which African American entrepreneurs built successful businesses, established networks of economic prosperity and aided in sustaining Freedmen's Town. In the following pages, I analyze section 7 and 8 of the Freedmen's Town historic district's 1984 nomination form, to draw out the discursive strategies of emphasizing economic histories and sustainable communities embedded in the community's origin narrative.

In the first paragraphs of sections seven and eight the preparer is asked to provide a one paragraph consolidated description (7) and statement of significance (8). These sections provide additional space for preparers to elaborate on the community description and tease out the significance argument. In addition, the preparers stress the age and unique features of the community in these sections. They take great care in outlining the mixtures of middle class and vernacular homes sites within the proposed historic district; "Within its boundaries lay a thriving black business district, residential neighborhood, Antioch Missionary Baptist church, the original colored high school and the black Carnegie Library."⁴⁰¹ Of the 580 structures that comprise the proposed Freedmen's Town historic district, 567 contribute to the historic significance of the site. The majority of the structures are dated between 1866-1934. The application asserts that the forty blocks that remain actually represent a much larger African American historic footprint dating back to 1866. In the first paragraph of section seven the preparer notes, "There is, in spite of this fifty-year span of time, a remarkable homogeneity among the structures in the

district. This derives, in large part, from the singleness of purpose for which the vast majority of the buildings were raised—as low to medium-cost housing for the black population of the Fourth Ward in Houston.”⁴⁰²

Freedmen’s Town is identified in section eight as “the economic, spiritual, and cultural focus of Houston’s black community.”⁴⁰³ At the time, only one other historic African American community in Texas was listed on the National Register. Clarkesville, a community just outside of Austin, was listed in 1976, but its rural nature made it, according to the preparer, too dissimilar to Freedmen’s Town to warrant comparison.⁴⁰⁴ Sections seven and eight work in tandem to lay out the significance of the community. Each contributes to a discussion that frames the self-sustaining nature of Freedmen’s Town between 1866-1934. The preparers also take great care to stress both the economic prosperity and entrepreneurship within the community as well as the intact historic structures that make up the vernacular landscape. In the following pages, I will provide an analysis of the discourses concerning economic prosperity, entrepreneurship and vernacular landscapes in Freedmen’s Town in order to identify the strategic rhetorical patterns utilized by the preparers in constructing the significance argument for Freedmen’s Town. While the homogeneity of the district’s fifty-year-old, mostly low to medium income rental housing structures was unique in 1984, it would likely not be enough to garner support for preservation on a state or national registry. Therefore, by including a discussion of middle class residential structures, African American social institutions, and stressing the centrality of the black business district in Freedmen’s Town, the preparers enticed support for designation by playing on the class bias inherent in historic preservation. In doing so, they created a strategic model of inclusion of

marginalized communities on the National Register. This is most evident in the rhetoric used to describe the vernacular landscape of Freedmen's Town in the Historic Designation application.

Across sections seven and eight the following statements help to construct the class dynamic of historic Freedmen's Town:

- "...The marshy area that extended towards Buffalo Bayou was only sparsely settled by people living in one- and two- room, wood framed cottages"⁴⁰⁵
- The overwhelming kind of buildings, for instance, are small, one-story frame structures, with few two-story frame structures situated in the easternmost blocks."⁴⁰⁶
- "In Freedmen's Town, in particular, the bulk of this housing appears to have been rental, with fewer than 15% of the black families owning their own homes at any one time (Rosenquist, 1942:36)"⁴⁰⁷
- It is not surprising then, that most of the construction which took place between 1900 or '35 in the Freedmen's Town Historic District was of speculative rental houses and apartments. TO this end, dozens of shotgun and other types of small wood-frame houses were erected, many by small absentee land owners and developers."⁴⁰⁸
- In an effort to house the growing population, and also, no doubt, to increase rental profits, these small houses were concentrated more and more closely together."⁴⁰⁹
- "Additionally, as it is more than evident in the photographs, the majority of the district's structures, while still occupied, have been seriously neglected over the years. Most are in need of paint, and porches and roofs are often in bad repair. Since more than 90% of these homes are owned by absentee landlords and the residents themselves have had little means to remedy this situation."⁴¹⁰
- "...According to the 1870 census, they seem to have found work in the city as washwomen, housekeepers, gardeners, laborers, and servants"⁴¹¹

- “According to a 1929 Housing survey, for instance, 25.1% of the respondents in the fourth ward said that their residences were in bad state of repair, and more than 29% complained of leaking roofs. Less than one half the residents had indoor water supply and only 18.9% of those polled had access to indoor toilets.”⁴¹²
- “Housing in Fourth Ward, as exemplified by the structures in the Freedmen’s Town district, for the most part reflected the demographic picture that emerged from the area during the first three decades of this century...Most indicative of this phenomenon is the proliferation in the district of a variety of shotgun houses.

Similarly, economic prosperity and entrepreneurship of some Freedmen’s Town early residents is expressed across the sections through these statements:

- “...more substantial houses from this area have served as residences for some of the community’s most prominent leaders; its ministers, doctors, teachers and small businessmen”
- “The son of Reverend Jack Yates, Rutherford Yates, for instance, erected one such home next to the family homestead on Andrews street (#294).”⁴¹³
- Just across the street, at 1319 (#290) (photo 10), lived Reverend Ned P. Pullum, an important minister and entrepreneur. This home was proudly illustrated in 1915 in The Red Book of Houston, along with photographs of the Reverend and Mrs. Pullum... ”⁴¹⁴
- “... A small number of larger, single-family bungalows were erected in the 1920s and early ‘30s in the district. Many of these were probably constructed by black owners.”⁴¹⁵
- One of the finest surviving examples of a black-owned and black-built home is the Alfred Smith house at 911 Andres (#548) (photo 28). Though unfortunately now abandoned, this home was illustrated in the July 24, 1920 issue of the Houston Informer as ‘a concrete demonstration of the fact that colored people desire and appreciate the best home obtainable.’”⁴¹⁶
- “With its own black commercial district gathered at this eastern end, Booker T. Washington High School (at the corner of San Felipe and Frederick), its fine Carnegie

Library (at the corner of Frederick and Robin), professional baseball field (located just southeast of the present district), and dozens of residential neighborhoods arrayed to the west, Freedmen's Town in the 1930s represented a thriving and self-contained urban community."⁴¹⁷

- "Yates, who was born a slave in Virginia, moved to Houston with his family in 1865. Only five years later, for the sum of \$50 he was able to purchase two lots in Block 22 of the Castanie Addition in the heart of the present historic district."⁴¹⁸
- "[Reverend Jerimiah Smith] played an instrumental role in 1910 in founding the Union Hospital, which once stood on the northeast corner of Andrews and Genesee. This is the first hospital, perhaps in the state, owned and operated by blacks."⁴¹⁹
- "This fine bungalow built in early 1920 by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Smith, black entrepreneurs who ran a successful café (now gone) in the eastern part of Freedmen's Town at 415 Milam."⁴²⁰
- "...some 95% of the city's black owned businesses were located on or near west Dallas, in the eastern section of this ward. In this area was located the Pilgrim Building, a black owned professional complex, and other enterprises such as the P and P Drug Store, Taylor's Jewelry, Harmon's Dry Goods, the Rainbow Theater and dozens of night clubs, beauty shops and assorted industries."⁴²¹

In comparing the language across sections seven and eight concerning Freedmen's Town's vernacular landscapes, middle class residences, businesses and social institutions, it is clear the community was self-sustaining during the era of segregation. In highlighting the economic prosperity and success of some Freedmen's Town residents the preparers were able to draw connections to a larger narrative of economic growth in Houston during the early part of the 20th century. Even though many of the structures included in the application are working class home sites, it is the middle class homes that are framed as significant and an integral part of Freedmen's Town's historic integrity in

the application. Freedmen's Town was an example of what Mary Patillo McCoy identifies in *Black Picket Fences* as "residential interclass interaction"⁴²² writing, "blacks of all socioeconomic statuses tend to be confined to a limited geographic space, which is formally designated by discriminatory practices of banks, insurance companies, and urban planners, and symbolically identified by the formation of cultural and social institutions."⁴²³ The interclass interaction within Freedmen's Town however, likely created stratification across class lines. Among other distinctions, these stratifications manifested thorough church membership, property ownership, and material artifacts exhibited within the home. They are also etched upon the landscape through the geographic placement of prominent homes along Andrews and Wilson Streets. The prime location of these home sites suggests their prominence in the community. At one point, the street car line passed directly in front of the Yates, Pullum and Vance homesteads (Figure 4.13). The interconnectedness of class within the community is further exemplified through the remaining structures, to which middle class bungalows aligning Andrews and Wilson streets are surrounded by low and medium income shotgun housing.⁴²⁴

Though some historical institutions that date back to its early years are still present in Freedmen's Town, for the most part only a few sites remain in their original form. For example, the Gregory Institute (later Gregory Elementary School and then The African American Library at the Gregory School) and the J. Vance house are survivals from the early twentieth century, as are a handful of small community churches that are still situated on their original sites. Most of the remaining structures had their original materials replaced. Along with the few remaining historic brick-lined streets and the intersection of Andrews and Wilson, these are the last vestiges of what remains of the Freedmen's Town described in the 1984 application.⁴²⁵

Some historic sites from Freedmen's Town have been relocated to the Sam Houston Historic Heritage Park in downtown Houston. Among the eight other historic



Figure 4.13: Houston trolley line in Downtown during the early 1920s. Notice the Trolley Tracks and power lines overhead. Those pictured are similar to the remnants of track that run parallel to the Yates, Pullum and Vance home sites in Freedmen's Town. Photo Courtesy of University of Houston Special Collections in the George Feuerman 'Texas and Houston' Collection."

structures that make up the complex, the Jack Yates home and a shotgun house were extracted from Freedmen's Town (Figures 4.14 & 4.15). Within the field of historic preservation, fervent debate regarding the relocation of historic structures to new locations has ensued in recent years. Opponents of the removal of structures from their original sites suggest relocation compromises the historical integrity in terms of setting and location of the structure. They point to the inherent ahistoricism in relocating a property as opposed to preservation on the original site. Opponents also scoff at the potential irreversible damage to the structure when moved. Proponents suggest moving historic buildings offers a level of protection from demolition or encroachment of gentrification. As was the case with most sites in Freedmen's Town, many buildings fell victim to arson and/ or condemnation by the city. Gentrification encroached upon the original boundaries of the community and developers snapped up land to build modern condos, bars and eateries. Of the original forty block community of 580 buildings included in the district, only eight city blocks remain. For the Yates house and fourth ward cottage, relocation did in fact save them from the bulldozer.⁴²⁶ The displaced structures in Sam Houston Heritage Park are in walking distance to the original site of another Freedmen's Town holdout, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church. The 1984 historic district represented only a portion of the larger black community that emerged after emancipation.⁴²⁷



Figure 4.14: Restored Jack Yates House originally located at 1318 Andrews Street. Yates is the founder of Antioch Baptist Church and was prominent member of the community in Freedmen's Town. The Yates House was relocated the Sam Houston heritage park in downtown Houston. Photo courtesy of The Houston Heritage Society.



Figure 4.15: Shotgun house (i.e. Fourth Ward Cottage) from historic Freedmen's Town restored and relocated to the Sam Houston Heritage Park. Photo courtesy of the Houston Heritage Society.



Figure 4.16: Present day Antioch. The church celebrated their sesquicentennial in February 2016.
Photo Courtesy of Antioch Baptist church website.

In this section, I focused on sections seven (description) and eight (significance) of the nomination form for the National Register of Historic Places in Freedmen's Town Historic District to draw attention to the ways in which the preparers connected Houston's economic boom period to Freedmen's Town's development and growth. Entrepreneurship of the communities' founders and the self-sustained community model they championed were also key components of the preparer's strategies. Couple these narratives with the overall historical significance of the district, and stressing the urgency of historic designation contributed factors to Freedmen's Town's placement on the National Register in 1985. Despite the historic designation, the district continued to fight gentrification, subsequently losing most of the historic structures described in the 1984 application. Those that remain are, once again, part of a contentious debate of preservation in a city that perpetually fails to preserve its history. In the next section, I

will address the collaborative efforts currently at work in Freedmen's Town to save what remains of the historic district.



Yates House, Before restoration

Yates House, After restoration

**“They” said the house was not restorable.
We saved over 80% of the original materials.
The house is now on the National Register of Historic Places. RBHY(c)-2000**

Figure 4.17: The R.B.H Yates House before and after restoration. The website notes, “some of our unrestored historic Houses look fragile and dilapidated from the street. But inside, the slow careful process of historic preservation is on-going, as part of our Preservation Architecture experience for students and community volunteers. Photo courtesy of RBHY website.

collaborative preservation efforts in Freedmen's Town. Grassroots preservation activists, educational institutions, churches, politicians, student volunteers and private donors partnered on various projects around Freedmen's Town in order to preserve what is left of the historic community. As one grassroots activist put it this way, “Erasing history of Freedmen's Town is the same as erasing hope for future generations.”⁴²⁸ In this section, I chronicle two collaborative efforts housed at the Rutherford B. H. Yates House Museum. First, I examine the preservation efforts of the house itself, and the collective organizing of community volunteers that subsequently restored the historic structure. I explore the network of activism between the Freedmen' Town Association (FTA) and the Yates Community Archeology Project (YCAP) in order to tease out the ways in which strategic partnerships advanced the preservation agenda. Second, I explore the network of

institutions that are part of the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition (FTPC) and their aggressive efforts to save the historic brick streets. I examine the lawsuit transcript from March 2, 2015, in order to establish the ways in which place-making and significance arguments are rationalized in the case. In both of these examples, the collaborative preservation efforts exemplify the extent to which strategic partnerships and symbolic preservation narratives can advance the agendas of grassroots activists in marginalized communities.

The Rutherford B. H. Yates House, Inc. (RBHY House) is a primary example of how community activists utilize historic preservation for social justice. This organization began as a desire to save the remaining historical structure on the Yates homestead. Jack Yates's home had been restored, removed and placed in the Sam Houston Heritage Park. His son's home was facing demolition before grassroots activists stepped in. According to their website RBHY House Inc. seeks "*cultural understanding through historic preservation and archaeology of the African diaspora.*" To achieve this, RBHY House Inc. operates an archeological field school and house museum and offers restorative history community programming.

Even before its founding, community volunteers conducted direct action protests against the continued gentrification of Freedmen's Town. These grassroots activists pooled resources to save the Rutherford B. H. Yates House from condemnation and demolition. In their efforts, the house maintained 80% of its original materials and what could have been little more than a distant memory, is now centerpiece of the education and cultural park in Freedmen's Town (Figure 4.17). The R.B.H. Yates house signifies the urgency of the situation in Freedmen's Town; "since its designation as a National

Register District in 1985, over 500 historic structures in Freedmen’s Town—including 6 churches—have been destroyed.”⁴²⁹ Through the partnership with two educational institutions, RBHY established the archeological field school. They host preservation Saturdays once a month as well as partner with other preservation nonprofits in Freedmen’s Town, namely the Freedmen’s Town Preservation Coalition, to fundraise and protest further gentrification in the community.

Similar to the institutional partnership examined in chapters two and three, Freedmen’s Town preservation activists sought to develop strategic collaborative initiatives with educational institutions in the area. Rice University and Houston Community College Central campus are two institutions that preservation activists collaborated with through the Yates Community Archeology Project.⁴³⁰ Founders of the program Carol McDavid, David Bruner, and Robert Marcom wrote a 2008 article entitled “Urban Archeology and the Pressures of Gentrification: Claiming, Naming, and Negotiating “Freedom” in Freedmen’s Town, Houston” that outlined the scope of the project. They write,

“We conduct field schools for several local universities and colleges, do mitigation and research archeology on various Freedmen’s Town sites, and implement a variety of public archeology activities. Over time, we hope to create a collaborative, contextual, reciprocal, and mutually empowered project that is community based, not just community placed (Ervin 2000). At this point the jury is still out as to whether that will be possible.”⁴³¹

The Yates Community Archeology Project situates grassroots activism and institutional partnering as a central strategy for successful preservation in marginalized communities. In fact, it was never the intention for the partnership to do anything other than strategically assist in fulfilling the agenda of the grassroots activists in Freedmen’s Town. One of the original facilitators of the partnership, grassroots activist Gladys House, gave

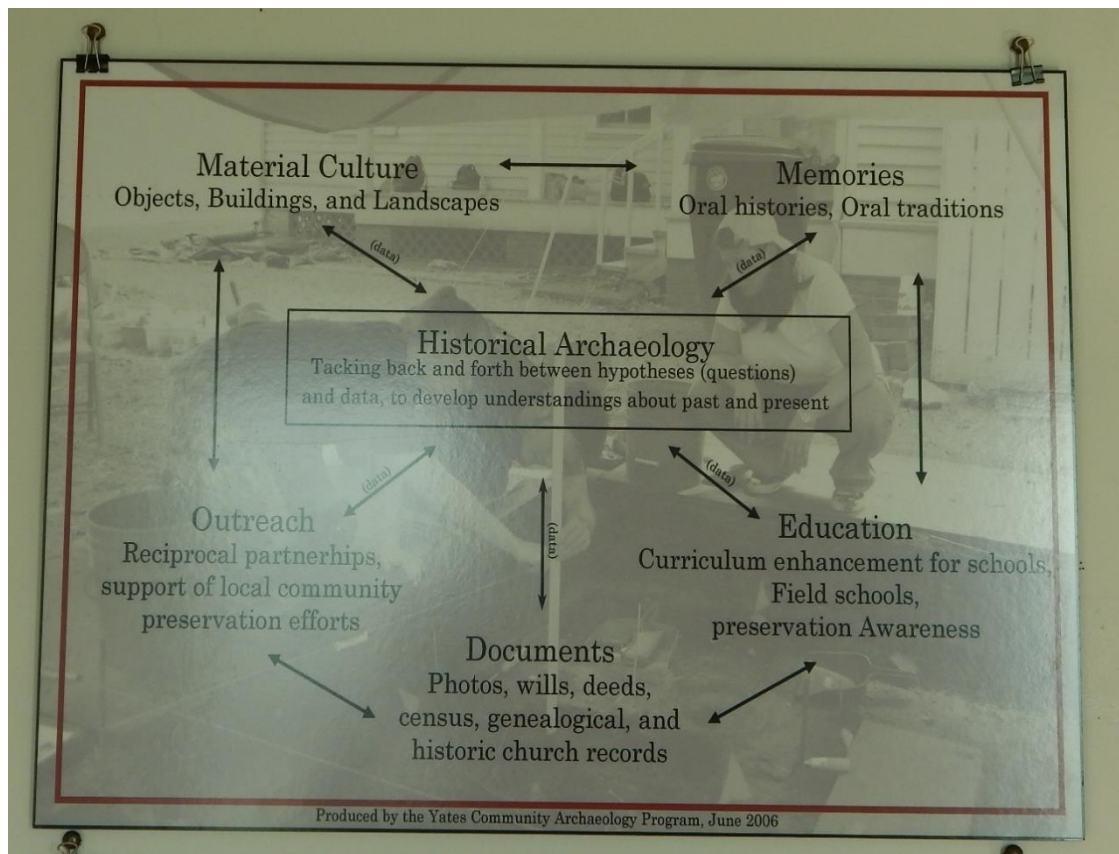
an oral history interview in 2005 stating, the Freedman's Town Association did not expect the work of the Yates Archeology Community Project "to aid directly in achieving their preservation goals."⁴³² Despite this, the Yates Archeology Community Project and the subsequent ongoing field school that grew out of it has provided visibility, fresh volunteers and educational institution support to Freedmen's Town.

Initially, the Freedman's Town Association (FTA) wanted three things from the partnership. First, they were primarily interested in the counter narratives new archeological finds could introduce about the past, particularly if that information could dispel racial and class stereotypes in the larger Houston community. Secondly, they wanted to utilize the work done by the professional archeologists (i.e. "done by people with Ph.Ds") to add legitimacy to their own work. FTA believed that utilizing the professional scholarship produced out of the YACP could help convince city officials that their community is worth saving. That is to say, "they used [YACP's] work strategically, when they [saw] the need. Third, FTA was enthusiastic about YACP's "ongoing efforts to talk to white people about African American archeology."⁴³³

The ability of the affiliate scholars from YACP to cross racial and class boundaries to raise awareness on behalf of Freedman's Town activists speaks to a larger issue within historic preservation regarding marginalization of African American historic sites. Though it was not explicitly expressed by LCHP or FSJC, the strategic partnering with resource laden institutions—usually predominately white institutions (PWIs) or religious institutions with predominantly white congregations—proved a successful endeavor. In Freedmen's Town the acknowledgment of these preservation politics allowed the grassroots preservationists and academics to directly address how best to

exploit their unique partnering. For FTA, the scholarship that came out of YACP's research proved beneficial when seeking grants, private donor funding, or combatting city ordinances. For YACP, the ability to bring Rice University students, usually white and affluent with little knowledge of racialized landscapes, to the field school and examine the historical legacies of segregation was immensely beneficial. In both instances, the pursuit of social justice brought forth unique partnerships with beneficial and lasting results for each organization.

The outgrowth of the FTA partnership and YACP grew into another partnership once the RBHY House was restored. Here, YACP transformed the community archeology project into ongoing academic courses for college students and housed their laboratory on site. From 2008-2013 students could enroll in 'Archaeological Field Techniques' (ANTH 362/ 562) at Rice University or, from 2008-present, Archaeological Field Methods (ANTH 2389) at Houston Community College. Each course taught students the methods of archeological study and brought them into the heart of preservation activism in Freedmen's Town. Class findings made up much of the house museum exhibits. Students from some sections created online digital exhibits to supplement the house museum model. Together with the historical background provided by FTA the exhibits connected Freedmen's Town to the larger narrative of African American history in Texas (Figures 4.18-4.23). The RHBH House model pairs grassroots activists with educational institutions in order to bring more visibility and support to preservation efforts in Freedmen's Town. The partnership helped to advance the agenda of FTA while also creating curricula that dealt directly with race and class issues.



Processes of Historical Archaeology

Consider the site's overall context
Examine historic maps, conduct surface survey, sometimes do shovel tests

Excerpt, 1891 Birdseye Map of Houston. Are the houses drawn in correctly? We do not think so. By comparing other old maps, we think that "Russell's" street is where "Cushing" is now. If we are correct, then the trolley line on the west is drawn in two blocks west of where it should be. This leads us to suspect that the houses are probably drawn in incorrectly also.
Source: Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-6002 USA

1869 Wood Map of Houston. Are the houses drawn in correctly? We do not know for sure. However, based on comparing some of the known houses, we suspect that houses may at least be drawn in on lots where houses did in fact exist.
Source: Houston Public Library. It has been cropped to show Fourth Ward, and street names have been added!

Example from 1891 Birdseye Map of Houston, Texas. Page 10. House names added.
Southern Maps, © 2001 by The Southern Map Company
Southern Maps, LLC

Example from 1891 Birdseye Map of Houston, Texas. Page 10. House names added.
Southern Maps, © 2001 by The Southern Map Company
Southern Maps, LLC

Robert Marcom and Crew
Doing surface survey of Wilson/Victor Property

Initial shovel tests in Yates Back Yard

Figures 4.20 & 4.21: Images from the Historical Archeology Exhibit on display in the RBHY House Museum. Photo courtesy of the author.

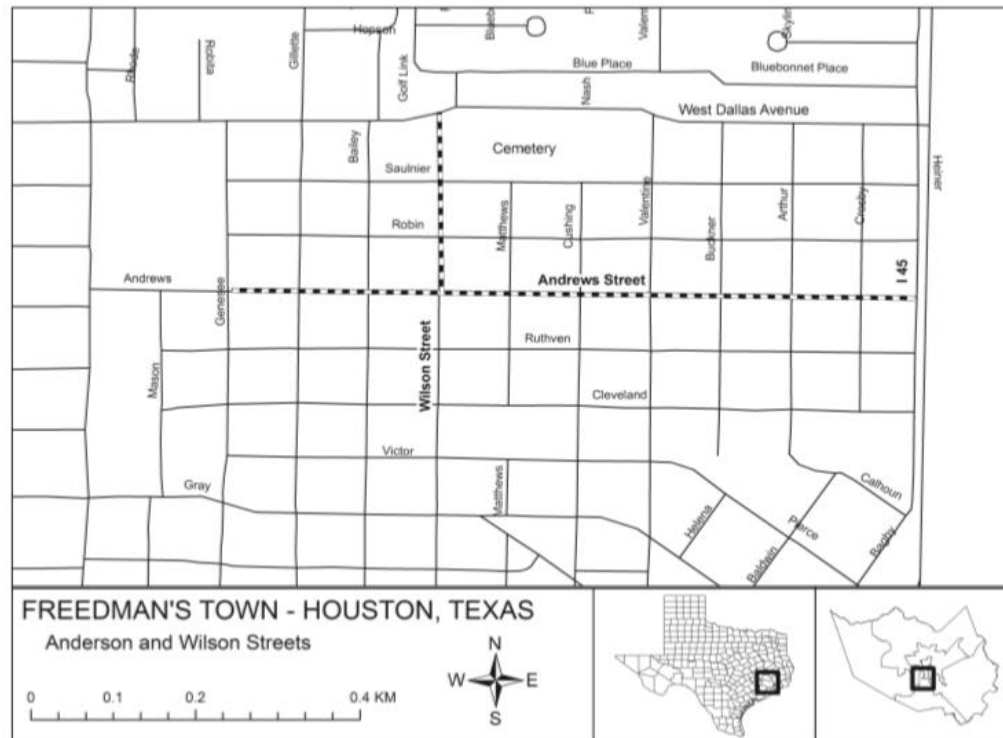


Figure 4.22: Freedmen's brick extracted from Andrews and Arthur intersection. Photo courtesy of the author.

Figure 4.23: Map included in 2008 article, "Urban Archeology and the Pressures of Gentrification: Claiming, Naming, and Negotiating "Freedom" in Freedmen's Town, Houston."

The RBHY House Museum is also home base for the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition (FTPC). The organization, founded in 2014, has taken a leading role in preservation in Freedmen's Town. It consists of several churches in Freedmen's Town, the R.B.H. Yates Museum, the Freedmen's Town Association and other nonaffiliated community volunteers. Collectively, the coalition fights the various threats that seek to dismantle the historic fabric of Freedmen's Town. According to one activist, the most pressing threats are city policies that support the continued gentrification of the historic district. These policies have, since 1985, caused the demolition of 500 historic building and seven churches.⁴³⁴ FTPC's primary focus is the protection and preservation of the historic bricks lining Andrews and Wilson streets.

The handmade bricks that line Andrews and Wilson streets represent an in-the-ground cultural resource of the Freedmen's Town community. Though their presence has taken on additional layers of meaning, originally, the bricks were the community's pragmatic solution to poor street conditions. Oral history testimony suggests the continuous flooding and malaria outbreaks in Freedmen's Town during the late 19th century caused members of the community to petition the city for better drainage systems and paved streets.⁴³⁵ The city refused. The community then turned to self-sustaining measures that pooled the resources and skill sets of residents in the community in order to pave their own streets. These handmade bricks are the work of former slaves and their descendants. Along with the churches and school, the brick-lined streets represent the collective efforts of the community to sustain itself during the era of institutionalized racism. Oral history testimony suggests that for the sum of \$125.00 to \$625.00, community members could have the street directly in front of their homes paved with

Freedmen made bricks.⁴³⁶ While the pragmatism of the brick lined streets demonstrates the community effort to address an issue not solved by the city, the symbolic meaning embedded at the intersections of the paved streets suggest the community was also seeking to pay homage to African traditions. Scholarship conducted by volunteer researchers affiliated with FTPC assert the bricks were laid in such a way as to suggest Yoruba cultural retentions.⁴³⁷

Dr. Kenneth Brown testified to the African retentions of the bricks at the street intersection of Andrews and Wilson on May 2, 2015. He states, “In at least two of the intersections where there is asphalt over the bricks, or the bricks have already been removed, I don’t know which, we did find the crossroads pattern. And in fact, we found it in both cases where it was bounded by bricks in yet [sic] sort of a square pattern around the intersections.”⁴³⁸ Brown goes on to assert the crossroads pattern is a religious symbol that was likely “for protection and for dealing with ancestors and community.”⁴³⁹ He states, “What’s depicted is a design that is used to confer protection, --to as well bring ancestors into the community, but primarily for protection of the space.”⁴⁴⁰ He also suggests the crossroads pattern was not accidental and likely served as a secret way of communicating between freed slaves.⁴⁴¹ Brown testifies, “There is a border pattern placed around the intersections in both cases; and two, these patterns don’t fit the streets the way the bricks were laid in the streets themselves. They physically changed the way they were laying the bricks at the intersections.”⁴⁴²



Figure 4.24: John Obsta, president of New Fourth Ward Homeowners Association, moved into a townhome next door to the RBHY Museum in 2008. The association was the loudest proponent of digging up the historic bricks. Photo Courtesy of nbcnews.com.

As outlined in chapter one, these 125-year-old bricks are the site of contentious debate in the preservation community. The Freedmen's bricks are the central focus of an ongoing lawsuit with the city of Houston and Conrad Construction. The two most pressing issues are how best to save the remaining historic landscape of Freedmen's Town and how to go about fixing the outdated piping underneath the historic bricks. FTPC sued the city and the contractor for disrupting the traditional historic place of Freedmen' Town, a site presumably protected through its designation as a nationally registered historic place. The issue is the installation of updated city plumbing in Freedmen's Town/ Midtown. The New Fourth Ward Homeowners Association, made up of mainly young, white dual income couples, pressed the city to update the city services in the area (Figure 4.24). Their primary concern was the uneven roads (mainly caused by the brick to pavement streets) and the inconsistency of water pressure from the city

lines.⁴⁴³ In order to rectify the problem, the city proposed digging up the pipes and replacing them. Initially, the plan called for trenchless digging—a process in which the contractor would access the pipes without disturbing the integrity of the bricks. On the day of construction, the laborers were instructed to dig directly down to the pipes, thereby disrupting the integrity of the bricks and removing them from their historic placement. Before construction could get fully underway, FTPC president Doris Ellis laid her body on the line (Figure 4.25), while other members filed an injunction against the city and Conrad construction to halt the removal of the bricks.⁴⁴⁴



Figure 4.25: Doris Ellis, president of Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition, protesting the removal of the historic bricks, 2015. Photo Courtesy of Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition.

The bricks became the current symbol of preservation efforts in Freedmen's Town, representing a larger discourse of grassroots collaborative efforts at work in the community. As a result of the ongoing lawsuit with the City of Houston and Conrad Construction, the "Save our Streets" campaign was initiated by FTPC (Figure 4.26).

Donate Today!
**You can “Make History by
Preserving History”**



S O S T-Shirts \$15.00

**In 1914 and 1922, the Freedmen and
their descendants paid \$125.00 to \$625.00
for the brick streets to be installed.
Will you Match their investment?**

Figure 4.26: Save our Streets” campaign shirts and call to action flier. Photo courtesy of Doris Ellis.

The public awareness campaign positioned the historic bricks as the symbolic representation of the deeply rooted history of the community. It called out the City of Houston for notoriously being “bad on preservation,” citing many of the city officials as the source of the problem (Figure 4.27).⁴⁴⁵ Freedmen’s Town activists are not alone in this assessment. In fact, other wards in the city have come forth to challenge city officials on policies that destroy historic attributes of their communities as well.⁴⁴⁶ The



Figure 4.27: FTPC mass distributed flier citing Houston city council members who voted to utilized trench technology in Freedmen’s Town and remove the historic bricks in the process. Photo courtesy of the FTPC.

“Freedmen’s Bricks,” as media outlets took to calling them, provided a visual image of the legacy of enslaved African Americans in Texas. They were easily identifiable, accessible, and unique to Houston’s historical narrative. Furthermore, the bricks served as a focal point for discussions concerning how best to protect and preserve the remaining historic district from urban renewal.

Selecting the bricks as the symbolic artifact as opposed to the middle-class homes and or vernacular landscapes remaining in Freedmen’s Town was a strategic maneuver by FTPC. The middle class homes represent, at least on some levels, that African Americans were able to break through some economic glass ceilings at the turn of the century. These homes, therefore, would only speak to a small percentage of the African American experience in Freedmen’s Town. The bricks however, represent the comprehensive level of marginalization experienced by all African Americans in Freedmen’s Town at the turn of the century. The geographical and institutional modes of marginalization manifested in the denial by the city to pave the streets and, by extension, offer city services in African American communities. Had the city initially paved the streets these historic bricks would never have existed in the first place. Second, the bricks signify the collective efforts of Freedmen’s Town citizens to first lay the bricks and, nearly 125 years later, preserve the bricks. They cross space and time to illustrate how grassroots organizing can effectively contribute to community sustainability and shape preservation policies in urban centers.

On March 2, 2015, the significance of the Freedmen’s Town district and the historic bricks within it were put on trial. The evidentiary court hearing transcript sheds light on the ways in which the bricks became a contested site of preservation. The case

involved FTPC and Conrad Construction, the company contracted to update the piping in the district.⁴⁴⁷ Upon the first successfully filed court injunction against Conrad Construction and the City of Houston, FTPC began to gain exponentially more public support for their cause. The city subsequently dropped their lawsuit against FTPC, but the construction company pushed forward. The expert witnesses brought forth by both the FTPC and Conrad Construction agree about the historic nature of the bricks. However, the protection of the bricks based on the Texas Antiquities Act and National Historic Register designation is disputed. During the evidentiary trial, Dr. Brown, key witness for FTPC, noted the historical, religious and cultural significance of the brick streets. Three sites of contention are documented in the evidentiary trial:

1. During Dr. Kenneth Brown's examination, the plaintiffs (FTPC) and defendants (Conrad Construction) dispute if the archeological permit filed by the construction company included the removal and replacement of the bricks. Within the permit, the Texas historical commission is listed as monitoring the means and methods by which the bricks were to be handled by the contractor. FTPC asserts the 1985 national register designation included the protection of the whole of Freedmen's Town, and thus the archeological permit must comply with the additional state and national laws protecting historic sites. Conrad Construction, in contrast, states "the Historical Commission has not designated, officially designated the brick streets in Freedmen's Town as a state archeological landmark (sic)."⁴⁴⁸
2. During the examination of registered landscape architect Janet Wagner the 1984 National register for historic places nomination form is re-evaluated. Wagner insists the bricks were laid by African American masons and are a "irreplaceable cultural site."⁴⁴⁹ She even dubs the bricks "Houston's Alamo."⁴⁵⁰ She argues that the bricks are included in historic designation because the "Nation Register includes everything that's there." The defendants' lawyer however, reiterates that the neither the brick paved streets or the crossroads patterns are specifically listed in the nomination form, nor are they "officially designated by the State of Texas Historical commission as a state archeological landmark."⁴⁵¹
3. During the Eric Skonberg examination the discussion of trenchless methods of technology is discussed as a means to retain the historical integrity of the bricks while also providing fresh water to the residents and sanitary and sewer lines. Skonberg asserts trenchless technology would be a competitive option for the city and the contractor. In fact, "in the City' design and Conrad's bid the water line itself is to be installed using trenchless methods."⁴⁵² In the cross examination, the defendants' attorney points out that within the bid, "in order to do this trenchless technology for all the underground work in this case you would have to hurt some of the streets to get to it."⁴⁵³ The defendant's statement implies that because some of the streets were already assumed to be damaged during the trenchless process *and* because the

brick streets are not specifically protected through historic designation they are therefore “fair game” and can be considered for the contractors project.

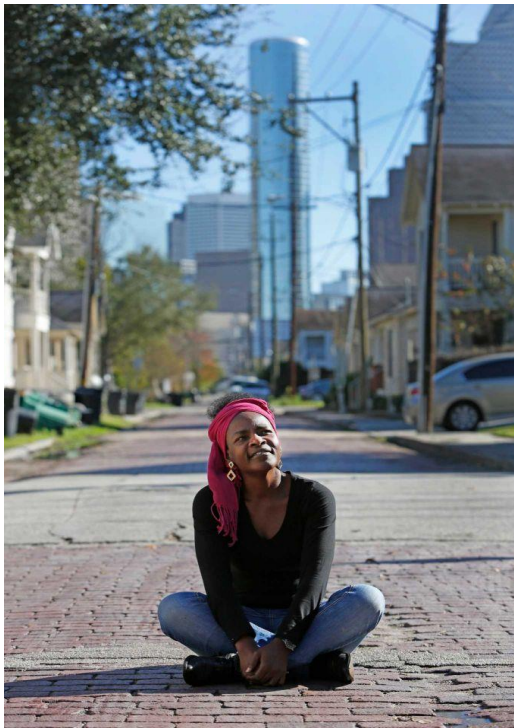
At each of these sites the level of protection for the bricks is examined. While the defendants argue the bricks are part of the district and the Freedmen’s district is protected, the plaintiffs assert the bricks are not explicitly identified as receiving protection in the 1984 nomination form. As I have already laid out in an early section of this chapter, the strategic approach of the 1984 nomination form highlighted the middle class home sites and entrepreneurial successes of Freedmen’s Town residents. While the bricks are certainly part of that discussion, the preparers do not state specifically the significant nature of the bricks. These examples also demonstrate the loopholes in protection by the historical commission. Gaping holes in preservation policy have in part led to contractors and city officials’ ability to navigate around and propagate urban renewal projects. The responsibility of protecting historic landmarks becomes less about the contractor or city officials’ willingness to do so, and moreso about the level of involvement and direct protest that grassroots organizations are able to ignite in the process of protecting their historic communities. Among these FTPC activists are four women who have taken leading roles in the preservation and protection of the district. I will highlight the activism of two of these women in the concluding section of this chapter.

The collaborative efforts at work in Freedmen’s Town have stood as a testament to the ways in which grassroots organizing can ignite impactful change in the community. Not only was FTA able to restore the historic homestead of Rutherford B.H. Yates, they were also able to parlay their efforts into a collaborative community archeology field school and house museum. Further grassroots organizing led to non-profit designation of

the RBHY House Museum and a partnership between Rice University and Houston Community College. Part of this collaboration was strategic, and ultimately led to the utilization of scholarly research to support claims already at work in the FTA preservation discourses. Additionally, further collaboration was initiated to form the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition, an activist group that is comprised of several subsidiary preservation organizations and religious groups in the neighborhood. FTPC has taken a leading role in the protecting and restoration of the Freedmen's Bricks. The evidence of their activism manifests through the "Save Our Streets" and "I voted to destroy history" campaigns as well as their current lawsuit with the Conrad Construction to stop the removal of the bricks from the district.

As I will address in the next section, the leadership of Doris Ellis of FTPC epitomizes the role women play in historic preservation in African American communities. Like the family turned community historians in LCHP, Ellis pulled from her own familiar family stories to develop a basis for her activism. She does not serve in a supporting role in preservation, as many of the women of FSJC, but instead takes an active and leading role in the preservation of Freedmen's Town. She has described herself and the collective efforts of FTPC as "activist."⁴⁵⁴ Ellis is not alone in her battle. Women in the organization, both white and black, young and old, have contributed to the overall success of preservation activism in Freedmen's Town. Though men in the community have provided additional leadership and support to aid in preservation, it is the efforts of Ellis, and other women including Gladys House and Catherine Roberts, that speak to the unique positionality of women's grassroots activism in historic preservation.

Women at Work



Above, Figure 4.28: Doris Ellis on the corner of Andrews and Wilson in Freedmen's Town. Photo courtesy of *The Houston Chronicle*, February 13, 2016

Bottom Left, Figure 4.29: Catherine Roberts (L) gives a media tour discussing the importance of the bricks. Photo courtesy of *The Houston Sun*.

Bottom Right, Figure 4.30: Gladys House sits at the intersection of Andrews and Wilson, looking towards a hopeful future for the community. Photo courtesy of *The Houston Chronicle*, February 13, 2016

“I was called on Juneteenth 2014... 149 years after the enslaved Africans had been freed,” Doris Ellis explains in a September 28, 2015, oral history interview.⁴⁵⁵ Ellis is the current president of the Freedmen’s Town Preservation Coalition (FTPC) and the editor-in-chief of *The Houston Sun*, a local African American newspaper in Houston, Texas. She is an active member of grassroots preservation efforts to protect historic sites in Freedmen’s Town. Ellis remarked that her newspaper had covered Freedmen’s Town preservation efforts for several years, noting “In the morgue of *The Houston Sun* we have more stories about Freedmen’s Town... than any other area of the city. And it was because the folk over here were always fighting. If it wasn’t Gladys House calling it was Lenwood Johnson... it was one thing after another.”⁴⁵⁶ Recognizing the community was continuously under threat and at risk of erasure, Ellis took on a leadership role in the Freedmen’s Town Preservation Coalition. Ellis is a strategist. She felt that the community needed an “iconic something” to tell the story of the community and serve as an easily identifiable rallying point for Houston preservationists.

“—well the bricks could be the iconic piece because they had a history within themselves. They had a history of being paid for by the Freedmen...they had to argue and fight for those bricks for six years before they were able to get them. So I knew we could tell a story around those bricks that could make sense and could maybe get people energized to become a part of the coalition.”⁴⁵⁷

Through grassroots activism, visibility within local media outlets and city council meetings, FTPC was successful in navigating the politics of preservation and effectively garnering support for their cause from Houstonians, lawyers and city council members. This section examines the preservation efforts of African American women in Freedmen’s Town, particularly Ms. Doris Ellis. It demonstrates how the torch of preservation in the community has passed through the hands of multiple female grassroots leaders, particularly Gladys House of the Freedmen’s Town Preservation

Association and Catherine Roberts of the Rutherford B. H. Yates House Museum. I argue that the efforts of these three women have dovetailed into the coalition that Ellis now presides over.

To begin where it all started, I must pay homage to Ms. Gladys House, whose activism in Freedmen's Town dates back to 1980.⁴⁵⁸ House recalls, in a 1994 oral history interview with Holly Hogobrook, that she became involved in preservation and revitalization in Freedmen's Town because "I became fed up with watching the so-called ministerial leadership of Freedmen's Town."⁴⁵⁹ Right away, the interview is alerted to the gendered bias in preservation and revitalization in Freedmen's Town towards the male leaders of the church. This is not at all surprising, considering the majority of the churches in Freedmen's Town at the time were either Baptist or Methodist. A similar tradition of following the male leadership of the church is discussed in chapter three. Whereas the women of St. John continued to take a supporting role in preservation and revitalization, in Freedmen's Town's Gladys House broke tradition and instead, started her own activist campaign. House founded the Freedmen's Town Association (FTA) to address the various injustices at play against the community.

House was pivotal in conducting early historical research on the community before any information in the local archives was available. Her Freedmen's Town collection is now housed in the special collections of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center. Upon delving into the history of the community, House recognized a pattern of institutional marginalization perpetuated by the city. House states,

"When Black communities constantly would build where the very government to protect them worked toward their destruction. Every time they would build up, they would run railroads. Back then, they ran the railroads through. Today they run the freeways through the neighborhoods. And,

you know, eminent domain and other forms. So it's not that the African communities today do not want to be improved or empowered. But they always. It's always confrontation or obstacle placed before Africans by the local, state or federal government. And so it's just kind of hard when you look at the non-African communities. They have the support of the government."⁴⁶⁰

House asserts that institutionalized marginalization was detrimental to the black community because, through avenues such as eminent domain or the expansion of railroads and freeways, the city state and federal governments have consistently sought to diminish the landscapes of African American communities across the country. This is, as I will address in chapter five, a common thread that runs through all of these preservation agendas; how best to address the social injustices perpetrated by local, state and the federal governments while also relying on policies and laws to offer legal protection to historic communities on the margins. During the oral history interview, House is reluctant to say desegregation was beneficial for Freedmen's Town. She states,

"Dr. King and all them because I say, well, they did not plan the long term adverse effects, because when you get ready to do anything, you say, well, what are the adverse effects short term? Okay? And, I guess, that outweighed what they thought was long-term, or if they even envisioned a whole serious list of long-term adverse effects. So, therefore, we are left holding the baggage of what they, well, my generation, I'll say, is left hold the baggage."

Whereas marginalization and segregation often go hand in hand, House is careful not to conflate their long-term effects. House's philosophy for Freedmen's Town's success focused on self-help and empowerment. She was the primary architect of several public awareness campaigns concerning social justice issues in Freedmen's Town including public housing maintenance, crime prevention, and arson investigations. House has collaborated with non-profit organizations that focused on the youths' needs within the community. The Fourth Ward Health and Educational Center for Youth, Inc., Fourth Ward Park Advisory Council, and the Fourth Ward Youth Baseball and Softball Association partnered with FTA to pass a resolution that demanded the city address the

needs of Freedmen's Town's youngest residents. House has also contributed to several interviews and radio talk shows to bring awareness to the pressing preservation issues in Freedmen's Town. She fervently opposed gentrification encroachment of the community since its onset. Through eminent domain, condemnation, and demolition, the community has continually deteriorated.

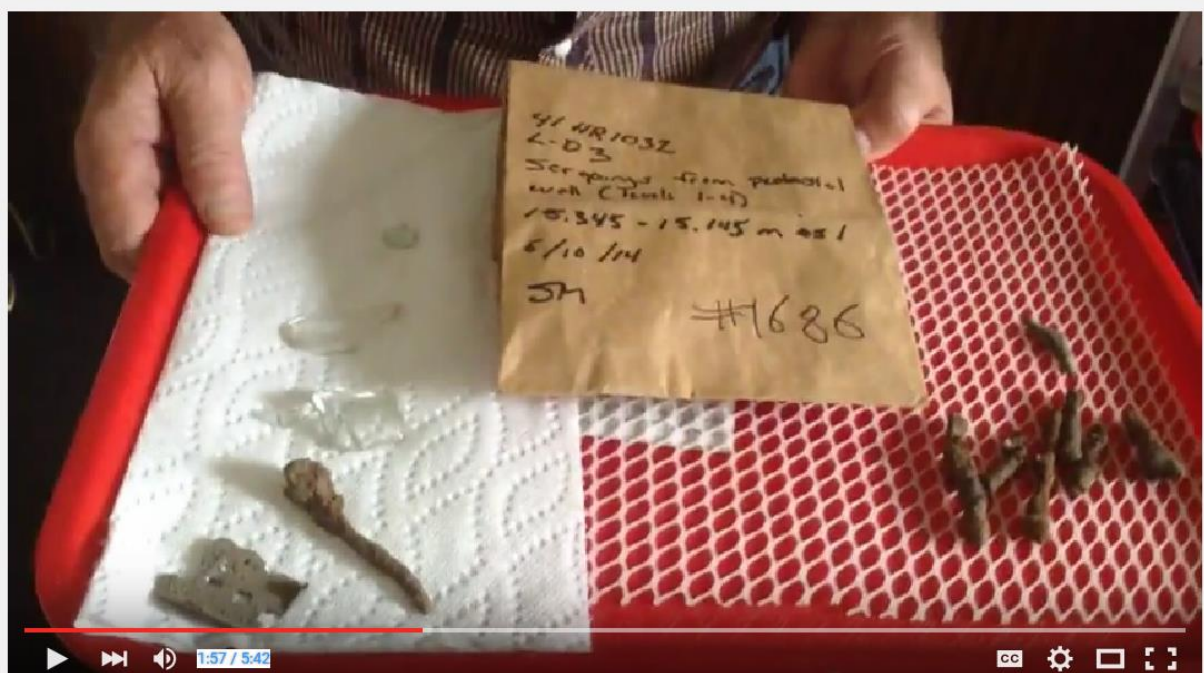
As a sixth generation Freedmen's Town resident, Gladys House has borne witness first hand to the steady progress of gentrification. Freedmen's Town historic fabric continued to deteriorate due to urban renewal policies implemented by the City of Houston through the early 2000s. To slow the process, the collaborative efforts between the Freedmen's Town Association and the Yates Community archaeology project were the brainchild of House in 2005. In 2007, substandard plumbing in the area led to a task force of community activists and political representatives (namely Mayor Bill White and U.S. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee) to address how best to rectify the piping issues while also maintaining the historical integrity of the streets. The task force resolved to move forward with trenchless technology methods to update the piping but also sustain the historic brick street where they laid.

House's thirty-six-year battle to preserve Freedmen's Town's culture and community institutions has ended in more defeats than victories. Nevertheless, she continues to speak out about gentrification's encroachment on the community and the city's role in facilitating the process. In a 2015 article for the Houston's *Forward Times Online* House asserts, "For the record, streets cannot be omitted from historic designation," said House. 'Europeans save their history with our tax dollars even if only one side of the building remains, then they focus on destroying our history from

buildings, sites and people down to our streets, curbs and sidewalks. We must preserve all our history no matter where it exists."⁴⁶¹

Another female activist in Freedmen's Town is Catherine Roberts. Roberts had lived in the Freedmen's Town community for over 20 years. She is a board member at the Rutherford B. H. Yates House Museum and an avid supporter of preservation efforts conducted in the Freedmen's Town community. The museum hosts preservation Saturdays every month, in which ordinary citizens have an opportunity to work on the restoration of historic homes in Freedmen's Town. They are also given the chance to work in the archeological field school, and collaborate on beautification projects around the neighborhood (4.31 & 4.32). Roberts leads educational tours and encourages participation in grassroots activism throughout the community, challenging volunteers to stand up against marginalization and social injustices wherever they are present. It seemed, upon multiple conversations with her during my tenure as volunteer researcher, that many have questioned her motives and reasoning behind investing so fervently in African American preservation. Initially, many community members were leery of her authenticity. Some thought she was a spy paid by the city, while others assumed she was just another white liberal come to take over Freedmen's Town. On the contrary, Roberts moved into the neighborhood nearly twenty years ago, and has actively pursued preservation activism in Freedmen's Town community ever since.

Roberts testified in open court on March 2, 2015, to the preservation activism she is involved with in Freedmen's Town. During the hearing, Roberts' gender and race are called into question.



Above, Figure 4.31: Volunteer archeologist Robert Malcom with Houston Community College demonstrates the cataloging system at the field school housed at the RBHY House Museum. Video still courtesy of the Author.

Below, Figure 4.32: A doorknob recovered from a dig at the Ned Pullum House. Many of the objects recovered have yet to be catalogued because of lack of volunteers. Photo courtesy of the Author.

Q: (Lawyer Ben Hall): Why are you so concerned? You are a white female. Why are you so concerned about black folks bricks in Freedmen's Town?

A: (Catherine Roberts): This is American History. It's not pleasant, just as the Holocaust wasn't pleasant. There are heroes that grew up in Freedmen's Town that created community after emancipation living under marginalizing Jim Crow laws. People need to understand that with those restrictions they still accomplished incredible fetes of building their community, creating businesses, building their own homes and churches, and starting their new life with horrible Jim Crow restrictions on their every movement. That history cannot be lost. The heroes of Freedmen's Town must be known to all the children and everybody in the future. Just like the heroes and survivors of the Holocaust.

Robert's testimony provides an example of one pressing matter in preservation policy today. While local and state initiatives have supported preservation resources from a separate pool for marginalized communities (take for example the Undertold Markers Program through the Texas Historical Commission), this practice further marginalizes the communities that seek visibility in the public historical narratives. It seems that, in some cases, marginalized community preservation efforts cannot sustain if they do not gain the attention of and collaborate with their white counterparts. This is perhaps, the most difficult proverbial pill to swallow in that this would mean that eventually, at some point across the grassroots agenda, a collaborative multi-ethnic project would need to occur. Because many of these communities are resource poor, it is imperative that they strategically, and consistently, pair with other groups and institutions that will provide additional visibility and monetary support for their efforts.

In Freedmen's Town's case, Roberts brought her knowledge of corporate charity. Roberts successfully raised the funds to restore the Rutherford B.H.Y. House through matching the gift programs at Fortune 500 companies such as Chevron, Shell, and Exxon/Mobil. These companies sponsor match the gift programs that funnel resources to local non-profits, cultural and educational institutions. For example, when a current or retired employee from Chevron donated time or money to the RBHY Museum, Chevron

would match their donation up to \$10,000 per employee (and up to \$3,000 for retirees) a year. Utilizing the corporate sponsorship through the Humankind project at Chevron allowed the museum to double their donation intake in a short amount of time (Figure 4.33). Shell and Exxon/Mobil offer similar programs to match employee donations to non-profits (Figures 4.34 & 4.35). Robert's utilizes this same model when raising funds for legal fees for the lawsuit with Conrad Construction. Private donors have given anywhere between fifty cents to twenty-five hundred dollars to aid in the preservation of the community. Under Roberts, the corporate charity fundraising was coupled with thousands of hours of volunteer time donated by archeologists, historians, structural engineers and lawyers. These strategies helped the RBHY House museum set an impressive model for preservation fundraising for resource poor community heritage projects.

Through Chevron's Humankind Matching Gift Program, the company matches donations from employees and retirees to most nonprofits including:

- Educational institutions (K-12 included)
- Health and human services
- Arts and cultural organizations
- Civic and community organizations
- Environmental organizations
- And most other nonprofits

Each current employee can request up to \$10,000 in matching donations per year while retirees can request up to \$3,000 annually.

You can view additional details at <https://doublethedonation.com/forms/chevron-guidelines.pdf>.

Chevron's Matching Gift Submission Process:
Donors should register their matching gift requests electronically at <https://chevron.yourcause.com/>.
Chevron does not accept paper forms.

Deadline:
Donors have until January 31st of the year following the donation date to submit match requests.

Figure 4.33: This Chart depicts the types of non-profits Chevron will match donations to through their Matching Gift Program. Photo courtesy of doublethedonation.com

Through Royal Dutch Shell's Heros (Helping Employees Reach Out) Program, the company matches donations made by current and former employees.

Shell matches donations \$1 for \$1 to most organizations including, but not limited to:

- Higher educational institutions
- Secondary schools (grades 9-12) and related foundations
- Arts and culture organizations
- Health and human service agencies
- Civic organizations
- Environmental organizations
- And most other nonprofits

Shell's Matching Gift Submission Process:

Donors can register their matching gift requests electronically at <https://www.easymatch.com/shell/> (recommended method)

Alternatively, employees can use a paper copy of the form which is located at <https://secure14.easymatch.com/shellgive/applications/givingcampaign/default.aspx?skip=download>.

If you have questions or would like a paper copy of the form mailed to you, please call (800) 554-7861.

Submission Deadline:

Shell requests that donors submit matching donation request soon after making the donation but accepts match requests up until one year after the donation.

Figure 4.34: Shell offers similar opportunities to their employees to provide in-kind donations to non-profit organizations. Photo courtesy of doublethedonation.com

ExxonMobil offers two different matching gift programs as a way to contribute funds to organizations which employees and retirees support:

Arts and Cultural Matching Gift Program

ExxonMobil matches donations to arts and cultural organizations. The company matches the first \$2,000 per employee at a 1:1 ratio.

Educational Matching Gift Program

ExxonMobil matches employee donations to higher education which include U.S. colleges and universities. The company provides a 3:1 match on the first \$7,500 donated to educational institutions (max \$22,500 company contribution).

The programs are open to current employees, spouses, retirees, and surviving spouses.

ExxonMobil's Matching Gift Submission Process:

Employees / donors should register their matching gift requests electronically at <https://www.easymatch.com/exxonmobil/>.

Deadline:

Employee have until December 31st of each year to submit matching gift requests.

Figure 4.35: Exxon/ Mobile offers similar opportunities to their employees to provide in-kind donations to non-profit organizations. Photo courtesy of doublethedonation.com

Roberts has collaborated on several community projects in service to the protection and preservation of Freedmen's Town. She speaks weekly at the Houston city council meetings on behalf of RBHY and FTPC. She is currently one of the most visible and active volunteers in FTPC. Roberts has a longstanding and dedicated commitment to the coalition, and proved a vital ally when I made initial contact with the organization (Figure 4.36).



Figure 4.36: Catherine Roberts (L) and Doris Ellis (R) seated in the RBHY House Museum archeological staging/ meeting area. At the time of the interview, FTPC was just days away from the injunction hearing to stop the removal of the bricks by the city of Houston and Conrad construction. Video still courtesy of Author.

The Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition (FTPC) has re-energized grassroots activism in the community. Established in June 19, 2014, the coalition is at the forefront of the legal and political battle to save the Freedmen's bricks. It has taking a lead role in facilitating preservation discussions in Houston regarding communities of color, urban renewal and gentrification. As represented in Figure 4.37, FTPC is the umbrella organization of four major community organizations working collaboratively to protect

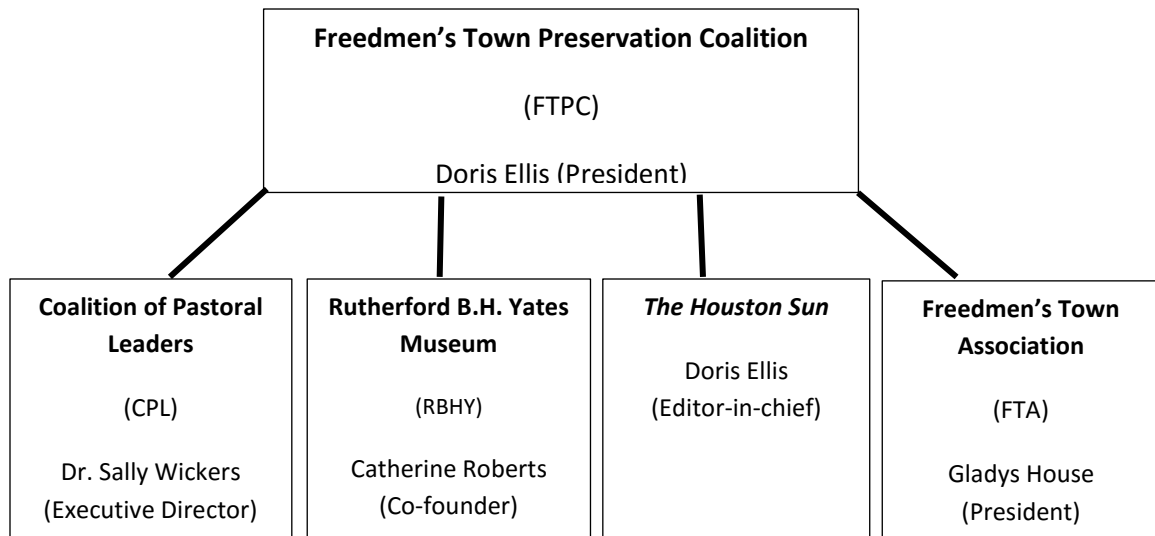


Figure 4.37: Organizational chart for Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition. Included are the four major organizations under the umbrella of the coalition. Each of the four have taking a leading role in preserving the social, cultural, political and/ or built environment of Freedmen's Town.

and preserve Freedmen's Town. Doris Ellis, the current president of the organization, has brought a fresh perspective on the preservation efforts in the community in three key ways. First, as addressed earlier in the section, Ellis selected the Freedmen's bricks as the iconic image to represent preservation initiatives in the community as a whole. These bricks were laid by freedmen and their descendants at a time when the city refused to provide services to African American communities. They were the ideal artifact to rally the cause of community preservation, particularly because they represented the tensions between marginalization and sustainability.

Second, Ellis has successfully initiated a new political discourse on preservation in Houston. Nearly every week since its founding in 2014, a representative from FTPC has attended the weekly city council meetings. They speak out against the lack of preservation protection offered by the city using arguments rooted in the language of the historic preservation law. The organization has utilized city council meetings as a platform to raise awareness and present information—to educate city councilmembers,

but also, because the meetings are aired on the public access channel in Houston, to offer a weekly dialogue across the Houston community about preservation. The citizens of Houston, Ellis asserts, have to hold the city accountable for their role in disrupting the historic fabric of one of Houston's oldest communities.⁴⁶² The consistent weekly dialogue with city council members has also provided a platform for FTPC to call upon the community for support. Ellis states, "support for money; support to allow us to come and talk and do teach ins; support so they wouldn't say bad things about us as we fought (fight); and we knew that we were going to need a lawyer, someone out of the community to hear our story."⁴⁶³ By using a platform readily available to any citizen, the public forum at city council meetings, Ellis and FTPC strategically placed their preservation agenda into the public sphere.

Thirdly, under the leadership of Ellis, FTPC has utilized local newspapers, television, social media and radio outlets to garner further support for their cause. One immediate benefit of the publicity campaigns included the entrance of a pivotal stakeholder, prominent lawyer Ben Hall (Figure 4.38). Ellis explains how Hall came into the fold: "The major success that we had, we were able to get a lawyer. After many had said no, we were able to get Ben Hall. And that was interesting—we had asked Mr. Hall, we had asked many of them—but Mr. Hall—on the day MLK's birthday was celebrated."⁴⁶⁴ Ellis chuckles to herself as she recalls this part of the story, and we pause for a moment to reflect on the timeliness of Hall's entrance into the fight. Hall, who is a civil rights attorney in Houston, is well known for his activism on behalf of marginalized communities. His mayoral campaign, announced in October 2014, was in its early stages

of development when he took on FTPC's case against the city and Conrad Construction in January 2015 pro-bono.

"He actually ran me down, learned where I was to make sure I took the phone call...so that we could get started with him working with us. And, I think we got the message around ten o'clock at night we started working. We to start working with him—in the midnight hour—and we worked to get the language for the restraining order...and we got the temporary restraining order, January 20, 2015."⁴⁶⁵

Ellis recalls the day the first injunction was filed. The now infamous body on the line photo (Figure 4.25) was snapped mid protest.

"[The] city said they would do a demonstration on how they would clean the bricks and so forth — long pause. BUT what they did was come out and did was dug up the bricks remove the bricks. and they had removed the bricks in a space that was the length of my body and something told me to just lay down. (Chuckles to herself) it was my height it was my width. and that stopped them on that day."⁴⁶⁶



Figure 4.38: Image photo-shopped as part of *Forward Times* online, which ran the same week the first injunction was filed. Ben Hall is a prominent Houston lawyer who was in the beginning stages of his Mayoral campaign when he took on FTPC's case. Photo courtesy of forwardtimesonline.com

Ellis' direct action protest demonstrates the level of dedication grassroots preservationists

have in order to save the places that matter to their communities.

Throughout this chapter I have analyzed a third African American community on the margins whose grassroots efforts have, in various ways, sought to protect and preserve their historic sites. Despite, or maybe because of, its inclusion on the National Register for Historic Places, gentrification has consumed nearly three-fourths of Freedmen's Town. Connecting the early history of Freedmen's Town's to the larger narrative of Houston's public history was the primary strategy in crafting the historic significance argument for the nomination form. Additionally, the middle class

homesteads and the entrepreneurial impulses of some of 19th -century Freedmen's Town's most prominent residents were emphasized in order to correlate with the "Houston as boomtown" discourses. I discussed how the nomination form pointed out that the regionally distinctive shotgun houses add value to the historic fabric of the community. These homes tell the story of low to medium income African American families at the turn of the century. Overall, the description of Freedmen's Town in the nomination form suggested its significance was intimately tied to the narrative of Houston's history.

Since 1985, the community has dwindled in size and prominence. The affectionately named "Midtown" has a new socio-economic demographic who possess little regard for the deeply rooted history of Freedmen's Town. Some older residents are taking leading roles in preserving the historical legacies, cultural landscapes and physical structures that tell the story of Freedmen's Town's heyday. Collaborative efforts between grassroots organizations and educational institutions have brought new stakeholders into the fold, and also, fresh resources to aid in the struggle. Through all of this, Freedmen Town's female activists have led the charge in guarding the remaining cultural sites in the community. The most recent and contentious debate has centered around the 125-year-old bricks that iconically represent the multiple sites of collaborative efforts to build, sustain, and restore Freedmen's Town. In the final chapter, I offer a comparative analysis across the three communities of study. I examine the "best methods" within each in order to develop a methodological toolkit for other marginalized communities seeking social justice through historic preservation.

Chapter Five: “This Place Matters”: Fighting to See another Day for African American Heritage Sites

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”—Audre Lorde

“Until the story of the hunt is told by the Lion, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

— African Proverb

The permeating theme of this dissertation is the systematic deterioration of historic sites in marginalized African American communities due to urban renewal, suburban development and gentrification. My research seeks to address the ways in which grassroots organizations pursue social justice through historic preservation.⁴⁶⁷ Grassroots preservationists in marginalized communities combat master plans on the ground and master narratives in the public history sphere, and their work should never go in vain. Nevertheless, the grassroots organizers I met work tirelessly to develop strategies of resistance that keep them in the preservation battle for another day, month, year, or decade. These initiatives, led by family historians, church women, and community activists in each grassroots organization, suggest that African Americans in marginalized communities utilize historic preservation as an avenue to address social injustices, but also to construct their own community history narratives. In this chapter, I revisit the efforts of the three preservation groups in Lakeland, St. John, and Freedmen’s Town in order to synthesize the two primary objectives of this dissertation; to offer a methodological toolkit built from a comparative analysis of the preservation efforts of grassroots preservationists in Lakeland, St. John, and Freedmen’s Town and to examine the ways in which historic preservation efforts in African American communities simultaneously address multiple facets of marginalization.

Building a Toolkit for Grassroots Preservation Activism

Primarily, my dissertation offers a comparative analysis of preservation practices in order to develop a practical methodological toolkit for grassroots groups serving communities on the margins. The methods included in this study, and synthesized in the forthcoming pages, serve as successful *models* of preservation efforts in marginalized communities. When deployed each preservation method can, in part or in whole, effectively and positively impact communities on the brink of erasure. This is not to say that other methods have not (or cannot be) successful in communities on the margins. Each community experiences discrimination and marginalization in differing ways, and it would be impractical to assume there is a “one size fits all” model of preservation. Rather, my method encompasses some of the commonalities across the communities of study—inhabiting geographically undesirable places, navigating oppressively racist spaces, and combatting institutionalized marginalization at the local, state and federal levels.

I return to the applicability of tactical urbanism as a methodological starting point for African American preservation. “Tactical Urbanism,” the current term used to categorize community-driven efforts of historic preservation, is defined as “small-scale, short term interventions meant to inspire long term change... [Tactical urbanism] is a city building approach featur[ing] five characteristics:

1. A deliberate, phased approach to instigating change
2. An offering of local ideas for local planning challenges
3. Short-term commitment and realistic expectations
4. Low risks, with possibility a high reward; and

5. The development of social capital between citizens, and the building of organizational capacity between public/ private institutions, non-profit/ NGO, and their constituents⁴⁶⁸

Tactical urbanism is most applicable to the preservation efforts at work in Lakeland and Freedmen's Town. In Lakeland, the collaboration with the American Studies department and Historic Preservation program at the University of Maryland provided LCHP a pool of resources. including event space to host programming, professional scholars to aid in research, and service learning opportunities for students. LCHP utilized these resources in accomplishing the organization's preservation agenda. In each of these examples aspects of tactical urbanism were utilized to advance the agendas of grassroots preservation groups in marginalized communities. In Freedmen's Town, where the contentious debate over the historic bricks continues to unfold, FTPC capitalized on tactical urbanism's five-pronged approach. As I addressed in chapter four, weekly visibility at city council meetings allowed FTPC to develop a public forum, that was enhanced by the platform of public access television, to highlight their concerns about preservation policies in Houston. They strategically aligned themselves with corporate donors to maintain a steady stream of financial support. They were also successful in gaining the attention of prominent Houston lawyer (and later mayoral candidate) Ben Hall. As a new stakeholder, Hall advanced the social justice agenda of the organization and gained more visibility for their cause simply by being involved. While tactical urbanism did not address all the needs of the organizations, particularly for Friends of St. John (FSJC) who were in the infancy of their preservation planning, it did serve as a starting point in understanding how some community groups addressed preservation from the margins.

African American grassroots preservationist groups require a more tailored plan that expands beyond the heritage tourism and economic vitality models championed through tactical urbanism. First, these groups must contextualize the social and cultural meanings embedded within each endangered site they seek to save. They also face the added burden of having to legitimize their significance arguments in a field where white, elite, meta-narratives are privileged over most others. An example of this was discussed in chapter three. St. John's historical significance was tied to the experiences of African Americans in Fort Bend at the turn of the century. FSJC navigated the contentious terrain of preservation in Texas, a state in which African American historic sites are underrepresented in the state's public history narratives. The historic marker application submitted by FSJC stressed the importance of preserving the African American history encompassed in St. John, but also strategically integrated a discussion of the Stephen F. Austin's Old 300 settlement and slaveholder Thomas Waters Dewalt. Aligning the church's significance with popular historical narratives already present in the state's public historic discourse brought increased visibility to the church's history.

On the county level, new stakeholders brought additional resources and networks of support. Most notably Bettye Anhieser, the chair of the Fort Bend Historical Association marker committee, joined the preservation efforts of St. John. She was influential in securing county support for the initial Undertold Marker application.⁴⁶⁹ At the state level, FSJC structured their Texas Historical Marker application with additional contextualization about the St. John school, the network of African American churches in Fort Bend, and the Dewalt plantation during Reconstruction. This allowed the committee

to distinguish St. John's history as significant, drawing connections between the church, the land it resides on a prominent planter's experiences after the Civil War.

My dissertation proposes a methodological toolkit that encourages grassroots activists to integrate the following strategies into their preservation agendas:

1. Draw attention to their cause and stressing the urgency of the situation;⁴⁷⁰
2. Rally support and raise money;⁴⁷¹
3. Collaborate with resource-laden institutions;⁴⁷²
4. Seek historic designation.⁴⁷³

In Lakeland, drawing attention to their preservation agenda included organizing a heritage weekend, curating the *A View from the Lakes* exhibit, and pursuing publishing opportunities through Arcadia Publishing. Each of these opportunities brought visibility to their historic community and generated interest in their preservation agenda. LCHP then set out on an ambitious oral history campaign. Elders from the community were encouraged to contribute their stories to the archive as part of the Heritage weekend celebration. While enrolled in *Social and Ethic Issues in Historic Preservation* in 2009, I lead a genealogy workshop as part of their oral history community archive initiative (Figure 5.1).

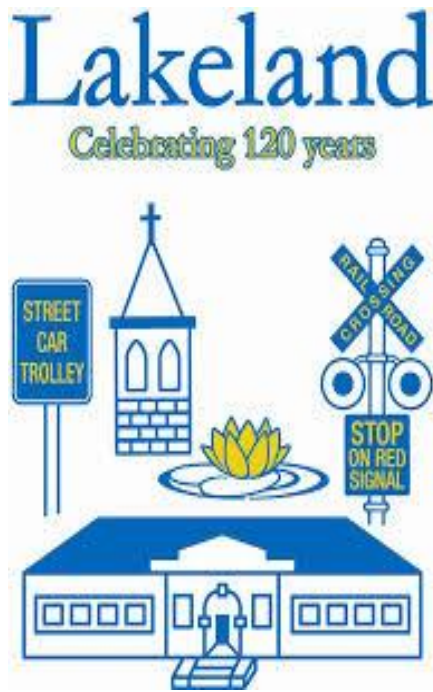
The process revealed the eagerness of Lakelanders to research more about their family and community histories. We worked across generational lines to utilize the technological skillset of the youth and the repertoire knowledge of the elders to find genealogical information through ancestry.com and familysearch.org.⁴⁷⁴ Genealogy workshops are an easy, low cost way to generate interest in the community history. They aid in instilling pride in the community and help break down intracommunity politics

between members. The genealogy workshop, another low cost, high impact strategy of preservation, proved to be a highlight of the heritage celebration.



Figure 5.1: Portia Hopkins (nee Barker) and Lakeland resident discussing family genealogy at workshop hosted by LCHP for Heritage Weekend 2009. Photo courtesy of author.

The Lakeland pictorial history book was a source of revenue for LCHP. They ran a series of book signing events and used the social networks at their disposal (fraternal



Figures 5.2 and 5.3: LCHP T Shirt designs. Photos courtesy of lakelandchp.org.

organizations, church groups, and civic associations) to publicize the book. LCHP's website offers donors the opportunity to give in a variety of ways, including credit card and Paypal options. If desired, donors can make their tax exempt donation a recurring contribution. Donors can also purchase T-Shirts that reflect their support of the community for ten dollars (Figures 5.2 & 5.3). LCHP funnels these resources into the heritage weekend and other events geared towards community engagement. For example, LCHP hosts a Beach Day every year. As noted in chapter two, the Beach Day is sponsored by LCHP and pays homage to the tradition of Maryland African Americans visiting Carr's and Sparrows Beach on the shores of the Chesapeake during the era of segregation. Though institutional racism divided white and black America, Lakelanders

recall many happy memories with family and friends at the beach. By reviving the community Beach Day LCHP aimed to attract more families, particularly the youth, to take part in a community building heritage experience that dates back to Lakeland's early years. In previous years, LCHP sponsored a Star Search talent show and community film screenings. In 2016, they added an amusement park day to garner additional youth attention.⁴⁷⁵ The revenue earned from all these events was funneled back into the organization's preservation initiatives.

LCHP consistently partners with resource-laden institutions. The Anacostia Community and Sandy Spring museums have offered programing that highlighted the rich history of Lakeland. LCHP parlayed these programing opportunities into additional speaking engagements. LCHP maintains active speaker's bureau that interested parties can request through the organization's website. The ongoing partnership with the University of Maryland's American Studies Department and Historic Preservation Program has proven a valuable resource for LCHP. A steady stream of student researchers aided the organization in tackling the larger research projects on their preservation agenda. A scholarly report entitled "Lakeland East of the Railroad Tracks" and a Black History Month program (Figure 5.4), a documentary about Lakeland's schools, and a mapping project are just some of the contributions these service learning classes have completed. Each of these examples contribute to the sustainable model of heritage preservation that LCHP has created. They are low-cost, high impact events that bring multiple generations from the community together for the purpose of building a sense of belonging amongst members.

Non-affiliated grassroots activists have tried unsuccessfully in 1983 and 2012 to gain historic designation at the state and national levels. At the conclusion of this project neither the community of Lakeland nor any of its historic buildings were included on the Maryland Register of Historic Properties or the National Register. Despite these setbacks, Lakelanders continue to strive for recognition in public history discourses, even when these effort reside outside of those organized by LCHP. A commemorative marker near Lake Artemisia and funded through M-NCPPC pays tribute to former College Park mayor Dervey Lomax. The marker represents the multiple narratives and preservation efforts currently operating in Lakeland. Historic designations serve the purpose of adding legitimacy to the historical significance of the community, but do little by way of protecting the community from further encroachment from urban renewal, transit projects or gentrification. Even with state or national designation, as I will readdress in



Figures 5.4: Based out of the American Studies Department at the University of Maryland, our Social and Ethic Issues in Historic Preservation class at the final Black History Month presentation, I am pictured right of center in black. Photo courtesy of the author.

Freedmen's Town case, the enforcement of the National Historic Preservation Act has proven more difficult to achieve. Therefore, in Lakeland's case (and other communities like it) honorary historic designation may be a secondary goal to seeking visibility in the political sphere and garnering public support. Revisiting difficult to enforce preservation policies at the local and state levels as well as working to ensure that intangible heritage gets equal weight in determining significance and protection is the recommended course of action for LCHP.

St. John has come a long way in terms of preservation initiatives. My first interaction with the church indicated that their preservation agenda was underdeveloped. They had, with the exception of two exposés on Fox 26, not fully formulated a plan of action to raise public awareness for their cause. According to some congregates, the surrounding community assumed the church was abandoned (or haunted), but certainly not an active institution. The physical condition of the church was in utter disrepair, and I can remember many Sundays holding my bladder through service so I would not have to use the porta-o-john or sitting with legs elevated to avoid ant bites.⁴⁷⁶ I am still in awe of the cheerful spirits of this community of seniors during those difficult times. Their faithfulness alone is a model worthy of emulation. The desire to preserve and restore the church building as well as document their history was the primary goal, but limited resources made it difficult to achieve this. Many congregation members live on a fixed income, and their limited internet access made it difficult to pursue these goals. Despite a lack of know-how in navigating the county archive, Deacon Gerald Rivers was able to secure three deeds from the clerk's office that served as the starting point for the preservation efforts at St. John.

A letter to the community was the earliest initiative to raise awareness of St. John's urgent situation and preservation agenda. Drafted by the pastor and deacon's board, the letter was addressed to the "neighboring communities" from "the members of St. John Baptist Church" (Figures 5.5a & 5.5b).⁴⁷⁷ It served as the sole public awareness campaign funded by the church congregation until late 2013. With the help of community volunteers, the church was able to continue to distribute the letter to the community and love offerings began to trickle in.⁴⁷⁸ The committee also created a church website and social media page on Facebook to gain more visibility for their cause. In 2015, the deacons and pastor compiled portions of the historical evidence the women organized and excerpts from Gabriel Cuellar's building assessment report to develop a portfolio to distribute to the mega-churches in the community. With some success, St. John has been able to stay in the public spotlight in Fort Bend County, and continues to work on visibility in the state discourses.



St. John Missionary Baptist Church
"We're Changing Lives Through Purpose"

To Our Neighboring Communities

As your neighbor we the members of the St. John Baptist Church located at 6731 Oilfield Rd. in Missouri City would like to convey to you our concerns and efforts to improve the appearance of the church building and landscaping. In recent months much attention has been brought to light by way of Fox 26 News and the Houston Chronicle concerning the state of this church. This was an attempt to raise funds to restore the appearance of this Historic Church. From the media exposure we were able to raise some of the funds needed to accomplish this goal. We would like to pause and say thanks to all of you who responded to our cry for help. However, we still have a long way to go and we need your help.

So that you will better understand why we are asking for your help let me share with you an abridged version of the church's history. St. John Colored Baptist Church (the original name of the church) was organized by a group of freed slaves in 1869. It has remained at its current location for over 100 years. Most of the second generation is deceased, others have moved away. Currently, there are eight members attending the church regularly, all of them are senior citizens and most of them have health challenges. Since October 2012 several people have given their time and talents in an effort to help this body of believers recover, restore and preserve the history of St. John Baptist Church.

On June 30, 2006 the building was set on fire by an arsonist. According to public records the Missouri City Police Dept., Fire Dept. and Federal Authorities (ATF), all determined that the fire was the work of an arsonist. However, to this day no one has been apprehended. Malicious acts of this nature cause enormous grief, anguish, hardships and feelings of hopelessness. When you take a hellish act such as this and mix it with problems and burdens many people already have, especially a congregation of eight senior citizens; it really takes the wind out of you. The fire that burned the church caused a tremendous amount of damage. Half the building was destroyed, all except the main sanctuary; however it did sustain heavy smoke and water damage. As if the fire wasn't enough, the members of St. John Baptist Church have experience several other acts of violence and hateful deeds. On several different occasions the building was broken into and all of the instruments and other equipment were stolen, this included two pianos. To gain access the thieves ripped the burglar doors off using a vehicle. More than once the building has been bombarded with shots from both a high powered rifle and a shotgun, with the shooter leaving their shotgun shell on the premises. Another incident involved someone breaking into the building and pouring old motor oil over the pews, flipping them over and then pouring motor oil over the pulpit and leaving a note that read "now your church has been anointed". On a separate occasion someone backed a dump truck up to the front of the church and dumped dirt in front of the doors blocking access into the building. There's more, but I won't bore you with the details. But let me say this, there is a verse in the bible where Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:18, **"And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"**. Neighbors, through all of this, the faith of this handful of believers have remained steadfast.

6731 Oilfield Rd 77459 P.O. Box 388 Fresno, TX 77545 David Fisher, Pastor (281) 431-2648



St. John Missionary Baptist Church
"We're Changing Lives Through Purpose"

Unfortunately, the church funds have been very limited and insurance was not affordable, therefore the building was not insured at the time of the fire.

Since the arson fire in 2006, the building has been **without** any utilities (water, electricity or sewer). In recent years it was discovered that the church has an "Occupancy Deed" which means the property cannot be used as collateral for any improvements. The deed also states that if the property is abandoned or regular church service is not held then the church loses the property. However, perpetual use of the property is guaranteed from generation to generation.

Metaphorically speaking, the church is in critical but stable condition. With your help it will recover. We would like for this church to become a vital part of the communities around it. The vision for the church is in several phases: restore or replace the current building, making it suitable for worship service, grow the congregation through evangelism and outreach, build the first stage of a new building that will be compatible with the community around it. The final stage would be to build the final addition to the new building, if it's not built in the initial construction of the new building. Then landscaping would be added to finish the project. The timeline is: stage one, restore or replace current structure ASAP (hopefully to commence in the fall of this year, 2013), and stage two would begin no more than two years after stage one completion. To start we need \$75,000.00 to restore or replace the current building.

We thank you in advance for your help and we pray God's blessings and peace be upon you and your families,

The members of St. John Baptist Church

6731 Oilfield Rd 77459 P.O. Box 388 Fresno, TX 77545 David Fisher, Pastor (281) 431-2648

Figure 5.5a & 5.5b: St. John's letter to the community. Photo courtesy of the author.

St. John faced an uphill battle in their public awareness campaign because of the limited resources the congregation had to offer in service to the cause. Also, the unfortunate arson in 2006 made the renovation project a costly endeavor.⁴⁷⁹ In fact, upon Cuellar's second assessment he estimated a half million dollars was necessary to restore the church completely and add a new fellowship hall (Figure 5.6). Nevertheless, St. John

PROJECT SUMMARY



Figure 5.6: Cuellar's project design; Main elements of the masterplan site design: 1. Historic church 2. Fellowship Hall, 3. Covered breezeway, 4. Gardens, 5. Field, 6. Monument sign, 7. Walking path, 8. Parking lot, 9. Drainage basin. Photo courtesy of Gabriel Cuellar.

continued to seek media attention through local news outlets including the *Fort Bend Star*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and Fox 26 news. In part, their ability to successfully raise public awareness has stemmed from the partnerships they have maintained. The collaboration with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Missouri City has provided a magnified platform for St. John. The missionary discipleship instilled in the church culture of both congregations has made the collaboration an outpouring of blessings for all parties involved. The love offerings and in-kind acts of service have provided St. John with a steady stream of resources to sustain their preservation mission.

St. John needs to continue to build partnerships with faith-based institutions across the county and state.⁴⁸⁰ At one point in their history, St. John was part of a larger network of Baptist churches. Networks of African American Baptist churches in Fort Bend connected congregations from across the county.⁴⁸¹ At the state and national levels, St. John once participated in Baptist Young People's Union, which brought further opportunity for networking and fellowship across congregations. A reengagement with state and national Baptist organizations would increase the visibility of St. John's preservation agenda and cause other Baptist missionaries to join in their efforts.

For example, joining either the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas and/ or the Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas could bolster the visibility of St. John's preservation agenda. These two state wide organizations cater to a large population of both white and black Baptist congregations.⁴⁸² The breadth of resources each organization holds is astounding. The Baptist Missionary Association of Texas has a two-year college affiliate (Jacksonville College) and a bi-monthly newsletter that gets distributed to over 400 Baptist churches in the state. The Missionary Baptist General

Convention has over eighty member churches in the Houston area alone that are within driving distance to St. John. They host a yearly convention that brings Black Baptist missionary congregations from across the state together for fellowship and discipleship.⁴⁸³ At the conclusion of this dissertation St. John was not a member of either organization. St. John is missing out on nearly five hundred additional opportunities to network, fundraise and engage in mission work with other Baptist congregations in Texas. When factoring in the multiple mega-churches in Houston as well, it becomes clear that St. John has underutilized the network of faith-based organizations at their disposal. In the future, and should additional partnerships emerge that are similar to that of the partnership with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, St. John would have the necessary visibility, financial support, and collaborative opportunities to ensure their missionary church remains open and operational.

Volunteer architects, historians, and engineers are also part of St. John's preservation team. Friends of St. John are the subsequent outgrowth of the Fundraising and Preservation committee started by the congregation in 2012. The group has continued to seek aid to help restore the church. As mentioned in chapter three, Sister Graves wrote a letter to the editor of the *Fort Bend Star* in April 2015 praising the community volunteer unit at St. John. Graves writes,

I have been secretary for St. John Missionary Baptist Church, Inc. for well over 10 years. I'd like to thank you for the article in the *Fort Bend Star*. I also want to give you some additional information, should you ever decide to do a follow-up article.

A couple of years ago, a young architect named Gabriel Cuellar attended our a.m. worship service, and offered his expertise pro-bono. His then employer, Anna Mott, did also. This enhanced our drive to recover, and we chose to restore rather than rebuild. Gabriel is instrumental in this process, and has personally secured grant funds for St. John. Also, Portia Hopkins, in conjunction with completion of her doctorate, has done extensive research of St. John's history. Her work is expected to be instrumental in securing an historical designation, should we get it. Sam Young, on

behalf of The Church Of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, has furnished, from his personal business, as well as the LDS, both services and funds. C&C Ins., Inc. was helpful in our securing proper non-profit insurance. Rev. Gerald Rivers has worked tirelessly to establish connections for services and funding, and we now have a pro-bono engineer on board. Rev. Rivers secured our website.

I'd just like to see credit given where it's due. We greatly appreciate the attendance of the (politicians). It may serve to spotlight the credibility of our endeavor. But action is what will get the work done. And many others are working for our cause. God has not only sustained us, He is sending us forward, and providing His people to meet our need!

Have a blessed day.

—*Rosa Graves*⁴⁸⁴

The letter to the editor points to two glaring realities within grassroots preservation activism in marginalized communities. First, a tension exists between how best to seek political support but also demand that politicians do more than just “talk the talk.” Grassroots preservation is maintained by concerned citizens and their everyday activism. It cannot, and will not, be a political talking point for politicians pandering for constituent support during an election cycle. Preservationists on the ground see through the thinly veiled political agenda of some political leaders who show up for the photo op and disappear shortly thereafter. Marginalized community preservation should not be a revolving door for politicians to demonstrate their cultural sensitivity for a captive audience. Instead, politicians should integrate the lessons they receive from observing the needs of grassroots activists into their policies and political stances on preservation. The collaborative work between St. John and local politicians *has* brought additional visibility to the cause. However, it has yet to be determined if the representatives (with the exception of Jerry Wyatt) will continue to provide a platform to raise awareness about St. John’s preservation initiatives. At the conclusion of this dissertation, Wyatt was the only political figure that has offered continued support to St. John. He has used his political position to not only raise awareness but also encourage donations from the community to

save locally relevant and historic places in the city. Earmarking monies for local preservation efforts or hosting a preservation forum where groups can collaborate on projects and share ideas are just two examples of the low-cost, high impact initiatives politicians can champion in their districts.

Secondly, the “it takes a village” mantra is useful when engaging in preservation work in marginalized communities. The efforts of a few dedicated individuals coalesce to prompt impactful change. For St. John, bringing together the expertise of an architect, academic scholar, engineer and other eager volunteers has “enhanced the drive to recover.”⁴⁸⁵ While their partnership with an educational institution has yet to fully (and consistently) take shape, the efforts of the current volunteer unit have provided the expertise and manpower to push forward the agenda items of the church. As the needs of the community continue to develop, particularly as the financial realities of restoring the building comes into focus, St. John will need to seek the support of concerned citizens whose network of resources reaches beyond the current group. For example, the expertise of Cuellar and myself in providing the building assessment and developing the historical narrative are significant. However, the half million-dollar renovation is going to take more than what either of us is capable of providing at this time. The obvious choice would be enlisting more volunteers and increase visibility of the cause, but in St. John’s case fewer volunteers with deeper pockets may be the appropriate strategy moving forward. This is why, though some are cautiously optimistic about the involvement of politicians, the strategic partnering with a few concerned and active politicians could potentially be a key factor in delivering the funds for restoration.

Finally, in March 2016 we got an email from the Texas Historical Commission that St. John Missionary Baptist Church was selected to receive a state historic marker for the site! We rejoiced; we laughed, we cried, we sang praises to the Lord Almighty! St. John was among the 165 approved historic sites for the 2016 cycle. As noted in chapter three, the additional contextualization of the history of the church with the land (and further strengthened by the strategic inclusion of narratives about Anglo settlement during the early republic and Reconstruction Era) factored into St. John's historic marker approval. Often it takes multiple attempts to gain a state historic marker, and the added blessing in this approval is that our application was accepted on its first submission. The Undertold Marker program, though useful in diversifying the state sanctioned public history narratives, does little to de-marginalize African American history. Therefore, should other grassroots organizations seek designation from their county and state, they should seek the highest designation achievable. This will aid in the process of bringing marginalized histories to the center of state history discourses. As I will discuss in the forthcoming pages, acquiring historic designation on the local, state and national levels, does not necessarily protect against demolition and/or development.

In Freedmen's Town, FTPC has done an outstanding job of keeping the public gaze on their preservation activism. Whether it be through the publically broadcast city council meetings or television news stories, there are few weeks that go by without seeing or hearing *something* about Freedmen's Town in Houston. In part, FTPC's successful public awareness campaign stems from the ongoing public battle they have waged against the City of Houston in order to protect what is left of the community. The consistent publicity has helped FTPC maintain a steady stream of community volunteers.

New, and sometimes high profile stakeholders, add additional visibility to the cause. As Doris Ellis explained in her interview, “People are active when the interest is high,” and FTPC has successfully maintained visibility across multiple media outlets.

Sadly, gentrification has claimed much of the historic Freedmen’s Town community, and the lack of enforcement of the National Historic Preservation Act makes protecting what’s left a daily struggle. The current threat to the community is the removal of the Freedmen bricks. It has taken court injunctions and direct action protests to stop contractors from removing this in ground cultural resource. The “Save Our Streets” campaign situated a symbolic object, the bricks, as the signifier of “history under threat of erasure.” Similarly, the “I Voted to Destroy History” put a face, several in fact, on preservation opposition in the city. The simplistic flier “named names” so to speak, in that it identified councilmembers who voted *against* the use of trenchless technology to update the pipes in Freedmen’s Town. Each of these campaigns brought media attention to Freedmen’s Town, which FTPC parlayed into recruiting fresh volunteers and new donors. Grassroots activists should take every opportunity available to voice their concerns about local and state policies that are detrimental to marginalized communities. FTPC has set an excellent example of public awareness using the open forum at city council meetings as a platform to expose the inconstancies in Houston’s preservation policy.

Through the leadership of Catherine Roberts and later under the umbrella of FTPC, corporate donorship reached an all-time high. Roberts brought her knowledge of corporate charity to raise the funds to restore the Rutherford B.H. Yates House, and later the legal defense fees for FTPC. Through match the gift programs at Fortune 500

companies such as Chevron, Shell, and Exxon/Mobil, FTPC was able to double their donations in a short period of time.⁴⁸⁶ Several local agencies offer similar programs and grassroots preservationists looking to raise their profile in their cities should seek out opportunities such as these that bring high profile donors into the fold.⁴⁸⁷ As marginalized community organizations, this may involve reaching out to those that are already well connected and have a sympathetic ear to marginalized populations' special interests. As was the case with Ben Hall, who took on the Freedmen's Bricks case against Conrad Construction, sometimes playing to the stakeholder's personal interest can be a strategic advantage.⁴⁸⁸

As evidenced in Freedmen's Town, inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places does not always mean legal protection from urban renewal or gentrification. Freedmen's Town was at risk of gentrification beginning in the 1970s. As a working class African American community on the west side of downtown, its marginalized status was connected to race and class issues. It therefore became an easy target for urban renewal. In comparison, The Heights, a white streetcar suburb just north of Houston, was founded in 1891. It has maintained most of its historic character, and many city initiated efforts have centered on restoring historic structures in the district. Similarly, in Houston's upscale River Oaks neighborhood the 1920s art-deco estates are meticulously preserved. Despite its prime development location between downtown and uptown, River Oaks has not experienced the same level of encroachment as Freedmen's Town. The 1985 historic designation and inclusion on the National Register has, frankly, done little more than demarcate the area of historic distinction. Condemnation of historic structures,

arson, and demolition has marked the fate of the original forty block community of 580 buildings included in the district, and today only eight city blocks remain.

As evidenced by the multiple state historic markers and inclusion on the National Register, Freedmen's Town is well represented in the state and national historic narratives (Figures 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14 & 5.15). While these designations most certainly help in crafting an argument against gentrification in some ways, overall the historic preservation laws are not strong enough, and enforced to the letter, so as to protect the community on the margins. Grassroots preservationists in other marginalized communities should proceed with caution in making historic designation their primary goal. Perhaps what is more reliable is a county or city council that is supportive of preservation in the community. In this way, the grassroots organizers will deal directly with local individuals whose electability is contingent on the constituents they marginalize. Reaching out to other grassroots organizations and putting pressure on local officials to be more proactive about saving places that matter is a practical strategy for success. While this is in motion, a subsidiary committee can seek historic designation, if it has not already been granted.



Figure 5.7. Origins of Freedmen's Town historical marker. Pictured are grassroots activist Lendwood Johnson (L) longtime Freedmen's Town resident (R). Photo courtesy of The African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.



Figures 5.8 & 5.9: Unveiling ceremonies at two historic churches in Freedmen's Town. U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee is pictured at both ceremonies. Mayor Annise Parker is pictured left of center at the Bethel Baptist Church unveiling in the bottom image. Photo courtesy of The African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.

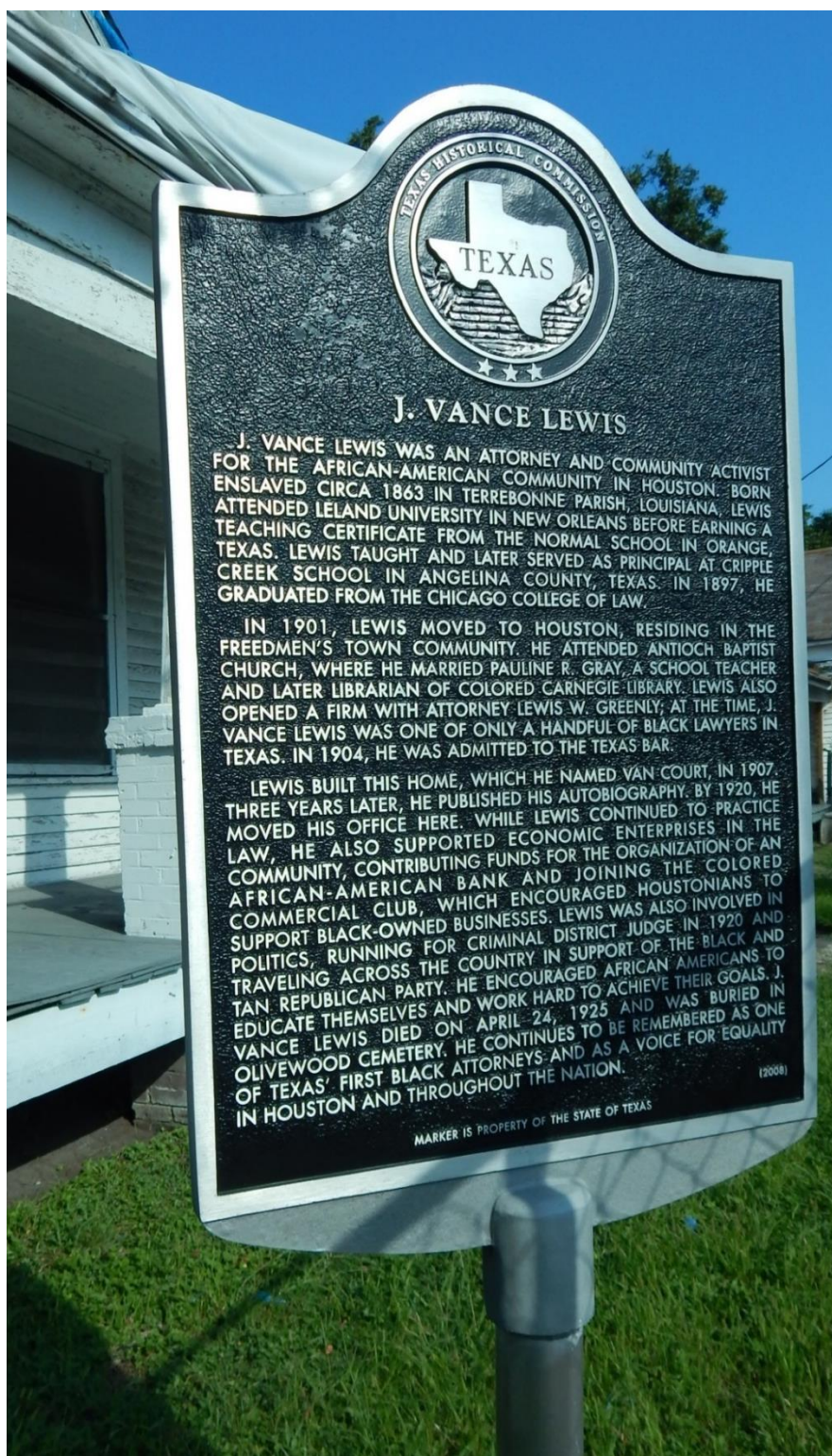


Figure 5.10: Prominent African American Lawyer J. Vance Lewis' house. Home sits on the corner of Wilson and Andrews Streets adjacent to Freedmen's Bricks. Photo courtesy of The African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.



Figure 5.11: Mt. Carmel historic marker. The church was condemned and demolished by the city of Houston. A prayer labyrinth and garden now reside in its place. Photo courtesy of The African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.



Figure 5.12: Homestead/ house Museum of R. B.H. Yates. Photo courtesy of The African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.

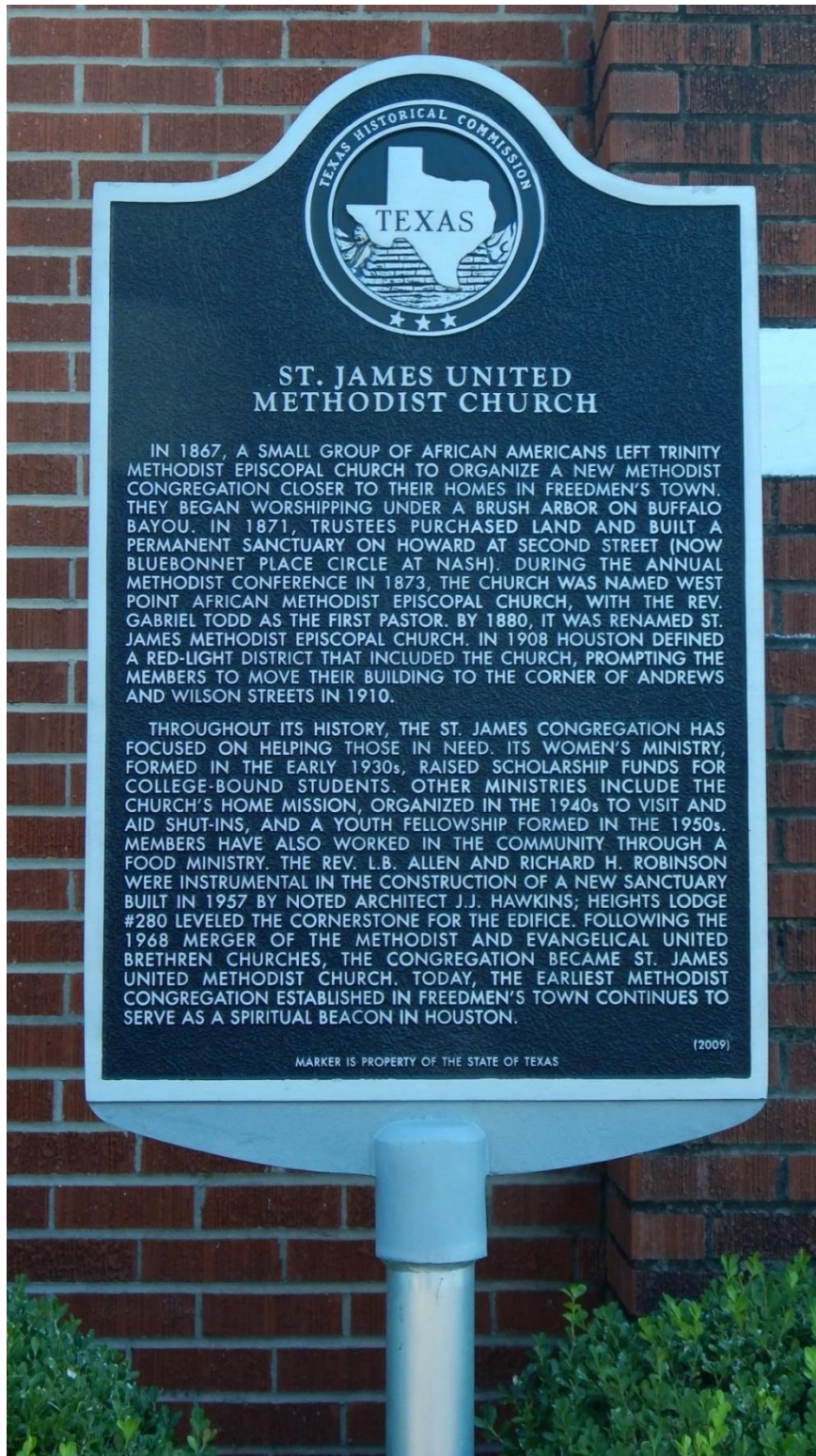


Figure 5.13: St. James Historic church in Freedmen's Town. Still standing on its original site. Historic Structure replaced in 1957. Photo courtesy of The African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.

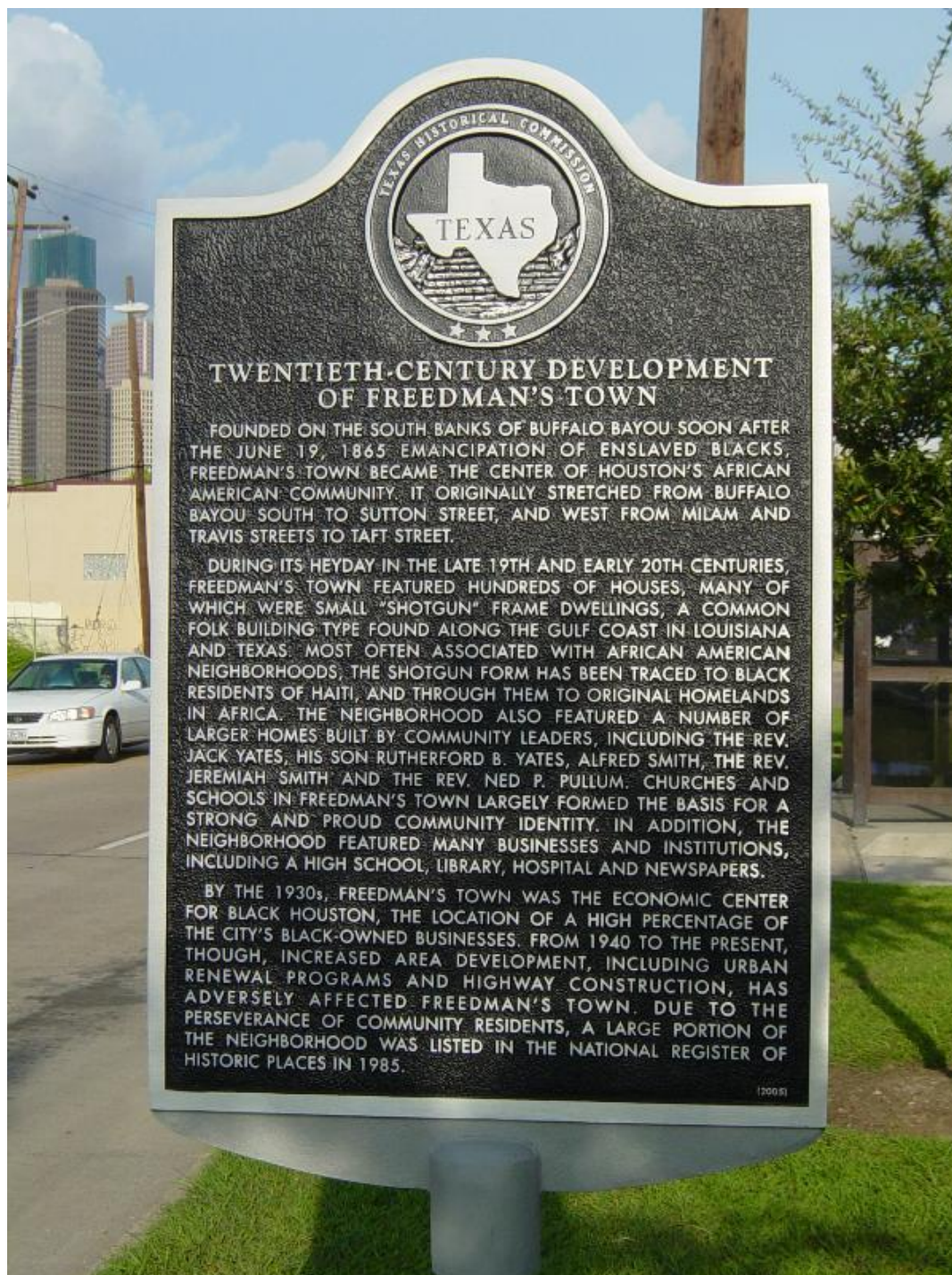


Figure 5.14 Historical marker for Freedmen's Town in Houston's Fourth Ward. Note the blended narrative of economic prosperity and the vernacular landscape presented. Photo courtesy of The African American Library at the Gregory School Archives.



Figure 5.15: Reverend Ned Pullum House historic marker. Fenced in due to recent vandalism. In the beginning processes of restoration. Photo courtesy of the author.

Navigating Marginalization through Grassroots Preservation

This dissertation has also sought to address the ways in which preservation activists grapple with the multiple dimensions of community marginalization. To do this, the organizations included in this study aimed to generate restorative history narratives. The foundational narratives constructed at each site addressed how institutional racism and systematic oppression affected the lives of their community members. They also highlighted the strength, courage and endurance of the founding residents as they navigated the cultural terrain of the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. Community recognition of this is perhaps most evident in the rhetoric found in the state historical marker applications and the subsequent verbiage on the markers placed in their communities. As Hayden reminds us in *The Power of Place*, “creating public history within the urban landscape itself, as well as words and images, to harness the power of

places to connect the present to the past. The work is time-consuming, interdisciplinary and politically controversial, but it is not particularly expensive.”⁴⁸⁹

The communities I analyzed battled with local and state policies that supported urban renewal suburban development, and gentrification. Upon their founding, these African American communities were situated in the lowest lying, least desirable, flood prone areas. The areas were not only undesirable; it was also unlikely you would find any white settlement within these areas.⁴⁹⁰ Whether with the expansion of transportation lines (through Lakeland), the suburban sprawl that encompassed the landscape (around St. John), or expansion of the freeway and Allen Parkway (in Freedmen’s Town), each community fell victim to urban renewal, suburban development or gentrification in some way. When urban development and suburbanization shifted the landscape, the politics of urban planning and marginalization were again brought into focus. Developers bought the cheap land and refashioned it to appeal to a white middle and upper middle class demographic. Today, student housing and redevelopment along Route 1 signify the inescapable reality of the University of Maryland’s influence on city planning in College Park. In Missouri City, the Lakes of Olympia Homeowners Association are nearly finished with the ten-foot brick wall that separates the half million dollar homes and St. John’s two-acre plot. A hodgepodge of trendy condos and restaurants now dot the landscape in Freedmen’s Town. In an interview with another Freedmen’s Town activist Holly Hogrobrook, she lays out how race and class become part of the gentrification process. She states, “it’s not a problem that black preservation is facing alone, when it comes to that insensitivity. But when you take that insensitivity and juxtapose upon it the natural racist -

racism and greed - that comes from being a part of the power structure, it poses additional burdens on communities like Freedmen's Town.”⁴⁹¹

In Freedmen’s Town what was once pitched as a “new urbanism” development plan has transformed into full scale gentrification. Initially aimed at replacing Alan Parkway Village, a public housing unit in Freedmen’s Town, the plan was packaged as offering an affordable homeownership program and reinvesting in the historic district.⁴⁹² Proponents of the 1997 plan boasted of mixed-use development that would bring residents and businesses back into the community. In fact, the three line items in the Summary Statement of Plan and Objectives tie economic redevelopment and reinvestment in historic preservation efforts in the community as central to the goals of the project.

- “To stimulate the revitalization of the historically significant Fourth Ward by attracting private debt and equity capital.”
- “To ensure that racial minorities currently residing in this African American Community will have access to affordable housing in the Fourth Ward, which after revitalization may be a non-impacted neighborhood.”
- To reinforce historic preservation efforts in this culturally significant African American community by developing 50 historic rental units and 50 rehabilitated single family homes for ownership. This effort will preserve the few remaining historically significant houses and construct new housing in compliance with historic guidelines in a designated area within the Fourth Ward (50 historic rental units and 50 rehabilitated home ownership units by 2000).”⁴⁹³

The plan claimed it would rehabilitate dilapidated bungalows and shotgun houses in the neighborhood. A trolley car route would serve as a nod to the district’s historical roots

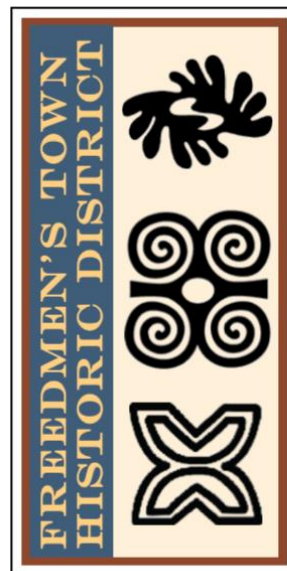
and attract heritage tourism. The redeveloped space would include commercial space, row-house style homes and modern townhomes.⁴⁹⁴ Funding for the redevelopment would come from the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH) and HOPE VI funding from the federal government.

The redevelopment plans never came to fruition.⁴⁹⁵ Instead, many historic homes were demolished and condos housing a whole new demographic profile of people became the norm in Freedmen's Town. The site plan that is housed at the African American Library at the Gregory School explicitly outlined the demographic that developers were seeking all along; white, mid-thirties, working downtown and looking to purchase property.⁴⁹⁶ The proposed way finders and signage included in the HACH/HOPE VI application seems like an ill-timed joke now (Figures 5.16 and 5.17). Freedmen's Town's steady decline at the hand of developers and city officials should serve as a cautionary tale for the other communities on the margins. Historic preservation activists sought to address the multitude of social injustices perpetrated against African Americans living in a resource poor area of town. In Freedmen's Town's case, the land was valued more than the heritage of the people who founded the community. In the end, the protections grassroots activists sought proved difficult to enforce. As Doris Ellis asserts in her interview,

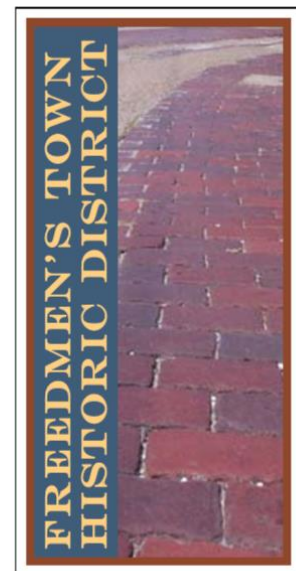
“...We have not nationally have had high enough interest so they [politicians] can go back and take another look at it [National Historic Preservation Act]. As grassroots groups around the country continue to do the kind of work we are doing in our locale and others are doing it they would be able to take those acts and put it forward—but it takes the people telling the leaders what they want to see done.”⁴⁹⁷

Until new preservation ordinances are passed and enforceable policies put in place, grassroots preservationists will continue to face challenges in holding developers and politicians accountable for their actions.

Another formidable difficulty faced by grassroots preservationists is that gentrification is not always holistically opposed within the community. Intra-community politics divide citizens (at times along class lines as well) and add to the messiness of preservation in marginalized communities. In Lakeland for example, the urban renewal plan was championed by one of Lakeland's own, Dervey Lomax. His involvement was met with



Option 1



Option 2

Left: Figure 5.16: Wayfinding signage to propose walkable routes in the community to heritage sites.

Above: Figure 5.17: Wayfinding Banners proposed by developers as part of the historic themed park within Freedmen's Town. The plan called for making a seven block historic district within Freedmen's Town, and revitalizing the rest of the area.

mixed emotions in Lakeland, and today still causes uneasiness when brought up to some Lakeland residents. In "Geographies and Psychic Landscapes: Hegemonic Discourses of

Urban Renewal in the case for Billy Weems v. the City of College Park, Maryland”

Braxton alludes to other Lakelanders who supported the urban renewal initiative. Without naming anyone specifically, Braxton is able to reveal the tensions that emerge when communities on the margins face urban renewal. More work, both on the ground and in the scholarly community, needs to be done that addresses how communities seek to rectify these social and political rifts. One way LCHP has facilitated the healing process is to host heritage celebrations every year. These events have provided a platform for the difficult conversations to occur at the community level. Perhaps more importantly, the ability of Lakelanders to look past their differences and celebrate their common bonds of belonging has allowed the next generation to see that regardless of their disagreements “community” means continuing to push forward towards a better future together.

Where Do We Go from Here?

This dissertation proposed that the utility of the preservation models deployed by each grassroots organization of study is accessible to the everyday citizen. The resistive strategies inherent in grassroots preservation activism have allowed communities on the margins to sustain aspects of their cultural heritage in innovative ways. Though these projects blossomed into large scale initiatives that included scholars, educational institutions, politicians, and corporate donors, the original seed of activism was (and will remain for the time being) the grassroots preservationist. The commonalities of experience across the community’s foundational beginnings was useful in conceptualizing how marginalization operated at the national, state and local levels at the turn of the 20th -century. Perhaps more importantly, when juxtaposing the similarities across efforts, various forms of marginalization experienced by the communities is

revealed. Through their activism in preserving African American marginalized communities, these organizations have, and are in the process of developing, unique approaches to navigating the field of historic preservation. When taken together, the initiatives of LCHP, FSJC, and FTPC establish the basis of a methodological toolkit which other grassroots preservation activists can deploy.

The ability to tell your history in your own words is empowering, but these community preservation organizations are not (and should not be) the only model of success in doing so. We must also take into account the many preservation activists who battle just under the surface, who donate anonymously, or who preserve culture in ways that are not yet conceptualized *as* preservation. In preserving places that matter, and remembering the people and stories attached to these places, activists have shifted power into the hands of marginalized communities. The systemic racism that shaped the foundational beginnings of Lakeland, St. John and Freedmen's Town cannot be trivialized simply because the era of segregation is over. Similarly, the ways in which local and state policies have propelled gentrification agendas and contributed to the deterioration of the physical and cultural landscapes in marginalized African American communities cannot be underestimated. The exclusion of African American historical narratives in state and national public history discourses cannot be disconnected from conversations that address other forms of marginalization.

This dissertation then, becomes as much about survival as it does about strategic resistance to power structures. Audre Lorde reminds us,

[Survival] is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own

game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those . . . who still define the master's house as their only source of support.”⁴⁹⁸

The tools included in this toolkit are not altogether new, but the manner in which these tools are deployed to produce a new platform for marginalized community preservation activism is unique. By reclaiming the tools of preservation and reemploying them to tell the story of marginalized peoples, grassroots preservationists have the opportunity to incite a movement of change within preservation. The methodological toolkit proposed in this dissertation is the outgrowth of multiple efforts of preservation. These tools are just some of many, and more work needs to be done that chronicles the evolving development of resistive preservation strategies in marginalized communities.

The struggle to preserve African American places is an ongoing battle. As new challenges emerge additional tools will need to be added to the toolkit. Preservationists must continue to stress the urgency of the situation. Historical markers do not substitute for the experience of walking the halls of historic homes or standing on the bricks Freedmen laid. In order to continue the battle, grassroots preservationist must recruit and maintain active volunteers, raise awareness and establish multiple collaborative projects in order to keep the preservation of African American historic places centered. Developing curriculum that speaks directly to the methodological approaches to saving African American sites, especially if instituted in public schools, is one way to get more boots on the ground.

Additional challenges that remain include the weakness of the Historic Preservation act and the ability of local and state officials to enforce it. State policies have dimly outlined their enforcement power, and these laws need to be revisited in order to offer

some level of protection for historic places. In order for African American cultural resources to survive, they must first be brought *into* the discussion. LCHP, FSTC and FTPC have initiated these discussions in their respective communities. It is their leadership that has, in many ways, created an avenue for others to organize preservation efforts and save the places that matter most to them. As FTPC President Doris Ellis asserts, “a little bit of leadership so that others can see. –and that has been the goal of the Houston Sun, is to present information so that citizens can see what other citizens are doing and maybe they will decide to do something themselves—we aren’t there yet but we’ve come a long way and the bricks are still out there.”⁴⁹⁹ Perhaps the basis of grassroots preservation in African American communities is best surmised by Deacon Walker; during praise and worship one Sunday at St. John he told us, “If I run out of breath, you guys just keep singing.”⁵⁰⁰

¹ James 2:17 (New Life Version).

² A libation ceremony is a ritual practiced in traditional African communities in which a liquid is poured upon the ground in remembrance of those who have died. It can also serve an honorable offering to a deity for protection and wisdom.

³ Freeman's Town, or Freedmen's Town, was founded by former slaves on Houston's Buffalo Bayou in 1866. In the midst of institutional racism and threats of violence, this African American community thrived. Leaders in the community pooled resources to provide civic services that the city of Houston denied to the community for decades. One of these services, paving the roads in predominately African American communities, was instead taken up by leaders of the community. By paying \$125.00, community members could get their walkway and street in front of their house paved with handmade bricks. Over the years, many bricks were removed and discarded because of new construction. Today, few bricks remain, and those that do signify the vibrant history of the once thriving community. Chapter four will discuss Freedmen's Town history in greater detail.

⁴ Ms. Ellis has appeared on various radio talk shows, *Good Day Houston* (a local TV series on channel 11). She has spoken at Houston Town Hall meetings, highlighted the coalition's work and testified on behalf of the coalition in open court. Her participation in the coalition's preservation efforts was outlined in an oral history interview on September 28, 2015.

⁵ October 1, 2015 the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition (FTPC) will go to court to learn the decision in the Appeal. Conrad construction has sued the FTPA because their efforts stopped work on the destruction of the brick streets. If the construction company wins the appeal, the FTPA will have to scramble to file another injunction. If FTPC loses, it is likely the legal aspect of the fight will continue in another form.

⁶ "Free Man's Town" or "Freedmenstown," dates back to 1866, when a small group of newly freed slaves purchased land adjacent to the Buffalo Bayou to hold church services. The area gained an influx of freedmen because of its proximity to Houston and cheap land.

⁷ Gentrification has overtaken the area surrounding downtown Houston and unfortunately, much of Fourth Ward has fallen victim to the bulldozer.

⁸ The African American Library at the Gregory School was originally the Gregory Institute, which served as Houston's first public school for African Americans.

⁹ Many of the homes in Freedmen's Town were condemned and demolished, or purchased by developers, torn down and replaced with townhomes. Some historic homes were taken by arson, urban renewal or gentrification.

¹⁰ Will return later to discuss the Rutherford B. Yates home in chapter four. The house resides on the original Yates Family Homestead in Fourth Ward. The family patriarch, Reverend Jack Yates was the founding pastor of Antioch Baptist Church. He was part of the group of Freedmen who purchased land on the banks of the Buffalo Bayou in 1866. His son Rutherford erected his home next to his father's, along the main drag of Freedmen's Town. Rutherford owned a thriving print company and also became a leader in the community.

¹¹ This house one of the few remaining historic homes in the neighborhood and local preservationists encouraged the current owner to retain the authenticity of the dwelling by painting the exterior with colors that were germane to the time period the house was erected. Because the home is historic, but not protected, the owner had total autonomy in choosing the exterior paint colors. The bright green trim seems out of place amongst the other historic cottages that kept the historical authenticity of their paint selection. This is just one example of the tensions between preservationists in Freedmen's Town, the new demographic of home owners and the ahistorical and misguided appropriation of 19th-century cottages in the neighborhood. Though minor to the untrained eye, something as simple as a paint color can compromise the historic integrity of a home in a historic district.

¹² Over the course of eighteen months I submerged myself in the preservation work of three community organizations in order to understand the nuances of preservation work they were conducting. Beginning

in fall 2009 I have worked extensively with one community at a time (first Lakeland, then St. John and finally Freedmen's Town) in an effort to dedicate myself (and my own expertise) to their causes.

¹³ Urban renewal, gentrification or suburban sprawl has greatly affected the communities. Various strategies of marginalization and disenfranchisement initiated by local and state governments, including refusing municipal services, redlining, relocation and forced removal, have greatly affected the communities included in the study.

¹⁴ Over the course of my eighteen month study several Op. Ed. articles ran in the *New York Times*. Each fleshes out the complexity of intertwined class and race issues that gentrification has created in American cities. A February 25, 2015 article entitled, "The Gentrification Effect" summarizes the epidemic that is sweeping through urban centers across the country. Gentrification has displaced African American urban residents and has also effectively changed the political landscape in America's cities. Author Thomas B. Edsall writes, "The political impact of these changes is primarily being felt within the Democratic Party, where the balance of power is shifting." The physical and political landscapes are not the only visible changes in gentrified areas. Hector Tobar notes in a March 21, 2015 *NYT* article entitled "Viva Gentrification!", "The vibe and ethos of [the] old neighborhood had shifted before [our] eyes: from a place where Latino people scraped by and took pride doing so, to one where newcomers practice conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure." Overwhelmingly, African American and Latino working class neighborhoods are being encroached upon in the name of gentrification. A phenomenal photography installation depicting the faces of gentrification ran in the *Times* on October 2, 2015. Each of these articles represents just a fraction of the national conversation addressing the multi-faceted issue of gentrification in American cities.

¹⁵ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-1900*, New York: Vintage Books, 2004, 194.

¹⁶ Each community has a strong history of church involvement, establishing schools, building social networks and cultural ties with other African American communities, or participating in social justice activism efforts that combat racism, social inequality, poverty, violence.

¹⁷ Additionally, within each community observed existed multiple sub-groups that struggled for visibility and power. The sub-groups negotiated their own inner politics while also navigating the social terrain of the larger community. Both "family" and "community" within my research were institutions that operated within an economy of marginalization. That is to say, each institution established rules, norms, boundaries, rituals, habits and behaviors that group members negotiated, abided by, or resisted in order to maintain the order and structure of the institution.¹⁷ This in turn created multiple layers of belonging for group members and each family and intra-community within the Lakeland, Magnolia Park and St. John negotiated their own political, social and cultural terrain interiorly while also competing for resources and visibility externally. During my research I worked closely families and community member participants of heritage organizations in the Lakeland, St. John Missionary Baptist Church and Freedmen's Town. I explored the ways in which these communities sustained communal ties through heritage preservation despite external and internal forces pulling them apart.

¹⁸ Time, loss of interest, and urban decay continue to strip away at the vibrancy of community history. As the gentrification of urban spaces casts the final economic blow, historical significance gives way to sleek mixed use high rise condominiums. This is the reality for those dedicated individuals seeking to recover and revive marginalized community narratives. Grassroots preservation organizations must establish a significance argument on behalf of the community, determine a preservation agenda, seek and secure funding (through public and private donors or county, city, state and federal pipelines), and assess the marketability and long-term manageability of their agenda (and in some extreme cases their community) in order to survive.

¹⁹ Not all community members included in this study identified their work as social justice activism. For those that did (Joanne Braxton in Lakeland, Gladys House, Catherin Roberts and Doris Ellis in Freedmen's Town) their critiques of various systems of oppression and modes of marginalization suggested that historic preservation was another platform in which to seek social justice for marginalized African American communities.

²⁰ In the fall of 2009 I enrolled in Dr. Mary Corbin Sies *Social and Ethic Issues in Historic Preservation*. This course worked closely with the Lakeland Community, a historically African American community in College Park Maryland, and sought to document, recover and interpret the history of the community with particular focus on the East side. As noted in the syllabus, "The Eastside neighborhood was redeveloped and is now the site of the Lake Artemisia Park." The Lakeland course revealed the multiple components of social and ethical preservation and enlivened my spirit to "dig deeper" with Lakeland and other minority preservation.

²¹ The relationship Dr. Mary Corbin Sies and Dr. Donald Linebaugh had previously established with the Lakeland Heritage Preservation Association allowed the graduate students to work closely with community members in a controlled environment without the added pressure of establishing contact, building relationships and locating informants. Removing this step in the process was beneficial in collecting data quickly, meeting assignment deadlines, and writing our final report within the sixteen-week timeframe.

²² The Lakeland community will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

²³ Previous courses such as *African American Material Culture*, *American Studies Theory and Methods* also opened my thinking to the different ways social and cultural influences affect our everyday lives.

²⁴ When I first began this research it was apparent that the grassroots preservation groups grappled with their own internal politics. The pain and anguish described in some of the meetings I attended was palpable, and as a newcomer to the organizations I had to tread lightly so as not to stir the preverbal pot.

²⁵ Tactical urbanism is often geared towards short term, low-risk, high reward projects.

²⁶ Laura Pheifer, "The Planner's Guide to Tactical Urbanism" (MUP Thesis, 2013, McGill School of Urban Planning, 2013).

²⁷ Across these communities and within their organizations, I heard, and bore witness to, the painful memories that preservation work uncovered. I was also present for those moments of clarity, compassion, and healing that developed when we grappled with these haunting histories.

²⁸ This was achieved, to varying degrees of success, through establishing significance arguments to include in public history narratives and through creating a website or generating social media presence.

²⁹ Efforts included designing and selling T-shirts in the community, establishing a heritage weekend or founder's day celebration, sending an open letter to surrounding communities, schools, and churches, initiating monthly preservation activities to help maintain volunteers, requesting supplies and donations from local businesses, and starting a crowd sourcing or go fund me account to raise money for special projects.

³⁰ These included two year colleges, four year public institutions, private universities, museums, nonprofit preservation organizations in the area, local historical commissioners and civil servants. Resources were not always monetary; social and political capital went a long way in helping the organizations garner support in the public sphere.

³¹ Whether it be through the county, city, state, or the National Trust, designation, historic designation was part of every preservation agenda of the organizations of study.

³² Mary Corbin Sies, "Regenerating Scholarship on Race and the Built Environment," in *Proceedings, Reconceptualizing the History of the Built Environment in North America*, Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/%7Ecwc/builtenv/papers.html>. November 2005.

³³ To understand the social and cultural processes of African American marginalization, we must begin with a discussion of segregated spaces and the social, cultural and geographical boundaries of racism. The practice of organizing spaces according to race, ethnicity, gender and class is central to the study of architecture and the built environment, planning, human geography and cultural landscape studies. Several scholars emerging from these fields explore the ways in which social, cultural and legal discourses become embedded into the politics of segregated spaces all over the world. Nineteenth century white control of spaces created a cultural landscape of exclusion, domination and containment that affected the ways marginalized groups lived, worked and played. This form of racial containment was enforced through laws, violence, terror, and socialization. The residual effects of nineteenth and early twentieth

century African American marginalization are still, in many areas of the country, sketched upon the landscape.

³⁴ Often small groups of organization members would meet after or larger meetings to discuss the larger system of socio-economic marginalization effecting the community. Sometimes these conversations would get heated. Names of the principal perpetrators of gentrification would emerge and the political connections they possessed were a sore subject. The hypocrisy of some political leaders was pointed out, with very little mincing of words. These conversations will remain, for the purpose of protecting the interest of the organizations included in this study, off the record.

³⁵ I use flexible, working definitions of “family” and “community” to inform my discussion. Family, in theory and practice, is complicated. For the purpose of this dissertation I conceptualize “Family” is a group of two or more individuals who share a residence, common bloodline, ancestral background and/or cultural values. The families I observed were multi-generational kinship units that included extended relatives, fictive kin, in-laws, and in some cases adopted children. In this dissertation “Communities” are small or large groups of people that share kinship bonds amongst its group members. The term can loosely connect multiple kinship groups over a span of time. It is not exclusive to geographic region but rather shared cultural spaces and social experiences. Like families, communities are complicated and multi-dimensional sites of identity construction. The academic institutions who partnered with community organizations in each community of study were as follows: The University of Maryland, a four-year state funded research institution partnered with Lakeland’s LCHP in 2009, Rice University, a four-year private research institution partnered with Freedmen’s Town in 2007. St John has briefly partnered with two educational institutions, Prairie View A & M University, a four-year state funded HBCU and Houston Community College, a two-year state funded community college.

³⁶ When thinking through communities and the ways that boundaries are negotiated the work of Richard Jones (“Theorizing Black Community.”) and Marlon Riggs (“Black Is, Black Ain’t”) is particularly useful. Both these scholars looked at the ways in which the Black community is defined and redefined through a series of events and identities, thus theoretically troubling the waters of “the black community.”

³⁷ Each site of preservation represents multiple networks of socialization, cultural production, and identity construction, as well as offers physical, spiritual and emotional support to individuals belonging to the group. Each is situated at the crux of belonging and unbelonging; they can be altogether inclusive of many (as witnessed at family reunions, homecoming celebrations or funerals) while also being selectively exclusive to a few (reimagining historical narratives that exclude certain realities). Within both the family unit and community there are limitations, boundaries, rule sets and obligatory duties that are established and maintained through a delineation of structural power. Simultaneously, resistive measures are taken by individuals and factions so as to further complicate roles and duties of the group members. These types of intrapolitics pose significant problems for preservationists doing genealogy research, collecting and preserving family and community heirlooms or archiving photographs and videos. I am particularly concerned with how these politics affect the preservation of family and community legacies and heritage.

³⁸ It was his wish that the ring stay in the family and that his oldest male heir, his only grandson, be the ring keeper. Until Bryant was old enough to understand its true meaning, he instructed, it was to be kept safe by “his girls” in the family trunk.

³⁹ As women, we are not only conditioned to hold the nurturer and caregiver position within the family, but also the protector and preserver of our family’s history through family albums, cookbooks, family stories etc. This ring had passed from hand to hand within our family, following the male lineage through four generations of Douglass men.

⁴⁰Brown, Elsa Barkley and Gregg D. Kimball. *Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1995, 313.

⁴¹ By locating the methodological gaps in the preservation we can begin to think more critically about narrative authority and why, even within the framework of historic preservation, African American communities continue to face an uphill battle.

⁴² Over the course of my research I was called upon to suggest a book or article that would help the preservation organization make sense of their current situation or navigate the field of preservation. I was

at a loss, because the literature specifically addressing how marginalized African American communities can insert their revisionist narratives into county, city, state and national historical discourses is thin, at best. Therefore, the necessity of the project became apparent as we realized that documenting the organizations' efforts would contribute to the grassroots activists, public historians and scholarly communities across the country.

⁴³Applying critical race theory and intersectionality to historic preservation and the efforts of African American community organizations provides a space in which activists and scholars can reveal and respond to the gaps in preservation efforts geared towards preserving marginalized communities.

⁴⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, "'We are not what we seem': Rethinking black working-class opposition in the Jim Crow south." *The Journal of American History* (1993): 76.

⁴⁵ I wanted so desperately to share their story with the world, and my urgency to do so often landed me in precarious situations. At times, my enthusiasm was met with skepticism and resistance. In one instance in Freedmen's town I was asked to explain, in great detail, why I wanted to participate in the Preservation Coalition's efforts and who I would be sharing the information collected with. One particular Saturday, when I was volunteering with the organization to clean up a house they were restoring, I was specifically asked NOT to share information I gathered that day, because the threat of the city's lawyers using information against the coalition was too great.

⁴⁶ Cultural Resource Management is a relatively new field. In Thomas King's *Cultural Resource Laws and Practice* the definition of cultural resources is, "aspects of the environment—both tangible and intangible—both natural and built--- that have cultural value of some kind to a group of people. (3)

⁴⁷ I was first introduced to members of the Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition at my scholar in residence lecture series hosted by the African American Library at the Gregory School. The Gregory School opened in the 1926 and is situated in the heart of Freedmen's Town. Due to the integration of the public school system, The Gregory school closed, and remained vacant until YEAR. Through the activism of local African American preservationists (including Patricia Smith Prather) The school was turned into an archive and research library. I was approached by a member of Houston's Preservation Society (a predominantly white preservation organization whose agenda focuses on preserving the elite homes in River Oaks) immediately after the lecture, and invited to speak to their organization about "African American Preservation issues." After exchanging contact information, I was pulled to the side by Catherine Roberts (the cofounder of the Rutherford B Yates Museum and active member of Freedmen's Town Preservation Coalition) who warned me about working with the Houston Preservation Society. From experience, she explained that they are less interested in African American Preservation and more interested in the allusion of diversity for grant funding purposes. To my surprise, The Houston Preservation Society and the Rutherford B Yates Museum preservationists had been at odds for several months prior due to broken promises funding reallocation by the city. This caused preservationists in Freedmen's Town to become of anyone with ties the Houston Preservation Society.

⁴⁸ The Coalition is currently fighting to prevent the Freedmen's Town bricks from being removed by the city. Though both the residents, the coalition and the city agree that the piping beneath the bricks need renovation, there is contention over the procedure: both removing the bricks and digging a trench (which the city prefers) or trenchless technology that would keep the bricks intact.

⁴⁹For example, in March of 2014 I finally landed an interview with Ms. Irene Hayes. It had taken nearly seven months to gain an audience with her. She was well into her 90s and, as many congregation members have asserted, "stayed busy." Ms. Hayes is the oldest member of St. John Baptist Church and has the longest tenure (nearly 82 years). She attended St John school when she was a child, had a sibling that is buried in the church cemetery, married her husband in the church, and has served her church community in various capacities for many years. Perhaps it was my naiveté that allowed me to think that she would willingly open up her vault of memories to a complete stranger. After all, I was polished, presentable and courteous. Being raised by a grandmother gave me a certain "touch" with elders that I often relied on the gain access to communities of interest. Armed with my preconceived questions, a tape recorder, and my consent forms, I felt as though was prepared for any curve ball that would be thrown

my way. What I did not plan on however, exactly what is happened that day. I soon came to realize that though useful in the classroom, all the theoretical frameworks and material preparation was less than useful in practice. No matter how well intentioned I may have been, Ms. Hayes would not be coerced into sharing more than she was comfortable with during those first interviews. She would have me fully vetted and read before she would let me into the interior of her memories about St. John.

⁵⁰ Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, the old man whose home was burned to the ground (with him in it), the relocation of Freedmen's Town residence when the freeway was built, The demolition of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, and the loss of nearly 70% of the historic structures between 1997 to the present.

⁵¹ As a volunteer, I worked under the guidance and supervision of the leadership team in each preservation organization to collect oral histories and material artifacts pertaining to the community's history before subsequently being released to "do whatever it is that researchers do." With this task came great responsibility, as I wanted to ensure that my narrative voice would never overshadow that of the preservation organizations. I quickly discovered that what I believed was of utmost importance and deserving of the most resources from the groups was actually quite low on the priority list of my informants. As an amanuensis, it was imperative that the historical narrative take shape organically. This process is expressly central in *Speaking Lives, Authoring Texts*. In the introduction, DoVeanna Fulton explores the relationship between 19th-century freedwomen and their amanuensis. Fulton writes, "The ex-slave women are in dialogue with their amanuensis and the larger society whose social constructs of race, gender and class marginalize them. At times their language can be unknown to the interviewer. Other times they speak in multiple languages, which offer multivalent narratively that seemingly satisfies inquiries of one audience while speaking more covertly to the other."⁵¹

⁵² The delicate balance between fulfilling my own research inquiries and narrating the history that the communities felt most comfortable exploring were in constant flux. In order for me to be an effective researcher, I had to become an active listener. By putting my scholarly pen down and listening to the stories that were being retold to me, I had to ensure the narrative voice of my informants was more dominant than my own.

⁵³ What was once a flourishing spiritual community and nucleus of African American culture, is now home to a historical placard and Freedmen's Town Labyrinth.

⁵⁴ Nelson unfortunately insults here informant upon here first meeting and has to regain her trust before the interview.

⁵⁵ Nelson, Linda Williamson. "Hands in the chit'lins: Notes on native anthropological research among African American women." *Unrelated kin: Race and gender in women's personal narratives* (London: Routledge, 1996), 189.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ In Lakeland I was first a graduate assistant researcher to LCHP and then a public lecturer at their heritage weekend celebration. With St. John I collected their church history from congregation members and wrote an editorial piece for Lone Star Legacy, a scholarly journal that focuses on African American life in Texas. I also publicly spoke about their history at church anniversary celebrations in 2013, curated an "African American History in Fort Bend" exhibit centering around the church's integral part in the community in 2014, and spoke publically around the state at Juneteenth celebrations and history conferences in 2015 about the church history and preservation efforts. In Freedmen's Town I participated in libation ceremonies, produced a case study for my scholar in Residence appointment at the African American Library at the Gregory School in 2014, spoke at city council meetings and lead a community discussion about preservation in Freedmen's Town at Rice University in 2015.

⁵⁸ This research was always meant to provide a platform that gave active voice to the marginalized communities and not add to the already saturated market of academic writings about marginalized communities.

⁵⁹ Nelson, 189.

⁶⁰ Grappling with these politics was one of the most formidable aspects of my research.

⁶¹ Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban landscapes as Public History*. (Cambridge: MIT press, 1997), 46.

⁶² The heritage narratives built within communities of color operate in and around both physical and socially imagined boundaries. Consider briefly an oral history given by a Lakeland community member in which oral testimony and corroborating newspaper evidence suggests that as African Americans began to settle in Lakeland white homeowners burned their houses in retreat. One account from the Baltimore Sun in 1900 details the burning of “two of the best and largest houses in Lakeland Prince George’s County.” This story illustrates the painful memories attached to Lakeland’s history as well as the racial tension present within the community itself. In spite of this violent resistance, Lakelanders settled and began to build a rich and vibrant heritage in College Park.

⁶³ Ned Kaufman, *Race Place and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Preservation*, (Routledge: New York, 2009), 68.

⁶⁴ For example, section 106 of outlines the federal regulations found in the National Preservation Act of 1966. The process of identifying significant historic places and assessing these sites for designation is tied to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Should the SHPO find that the integrity of a historic site was compromised (as outlined in 800.5) or that the site does not meet the criteria for eligibility specified by the policy, the grassroots organization is left with few options in pursuing federal protection under the National Preservation Act.

⁶⁵ Brent Leggs Kerri Rubman, and Bryd Wood, “Preserving African American Historic Places,” (Washington D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2012), 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁸ One site of particular interest in the Project Row Houses located in Houston, Texas. When juxtaposing Project Row Houses to the activism in Freedmen’s Town, it becomes clear that all historic preservation efforts, even those within the same city and that target similar communities, have vastly different results. For example, in Freedmen’s Town the focus on preservation and interpretation of the historic sites in the community has affected the type of volunteers that make up the Freedmen’s Town Preservation Coalition. At Project row house, the emphasis on Art, community revitalization and historic preservation has allowed their organization to draw from a larger resources pool and volunteer base. In addition, with the collective buy in of community churches, businessmen, artists and local universities, Project Row House has successfully developed new programs and grown their organization at a steady and continuous pace since its establishment in 1993.

⁶⁹ Angel David Nieves and Leslie M. Alexander, *“We Shall Independent Be”: African American Place Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008).

⁷⁰ Angel David Nieves “Public History and ‘Memorial Architecture’ in the “New” South Africa: The Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum, Soweto, Johannesburg,” *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2007): 351 and 199.

⁷¹ Nieves’ work is useful in thinking through the politics of preservation within communities entangled in difficult histories. It demonstrates how the process of preservation can begin to heal some of the social and cultural wounds of past generations.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The most visible “who” would then become the state or national governing body for historic preservation. This dissertation addresses the state entities in Maryland and Texas that determine significance and allocate resources to community preservation groups and institutions for historical markers and public history programming.

⁷⁵ Max Page and Randall Mason eds. *Giving Preservation a History: Histories Preservation in United States*. New York: Routledge, 2004), 64.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁷⁷ Many historic preservation practitioners have held steadfast to the tradition that focuses resources on saving spaces of white privilege (the estates of the white elite such as politicians, entrepreneurs, plantation owners etc.).

⁷⁸ The interpretation of the enslaved African American presence on plantations in the Antebellum south or as sharecroppers and domestic servants during the late 19th and early 20^s century has continuously linked African American historical narratives to subservient marginalized experiences while also reinforcing the privileges of whiteness that pervaded the 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Insurgent historical narratives provide a platform for marginalized communities to assert their voices in local, state and national preservation discourses. It is these insurgent historic preservation narratives that offer many African American communities the opportunity to tell their own stories on their own terms.

⁸¹ Kate Clark, "In Small Things Remembered: Significance and Vulnerability in the Management of Robben Island World Heritage Site" in *Materiel Culture: The Archeology of Twentieth Century Conflict* eds. Colleen M. Beck, William Gray Johnson, John Schofield, (Routledge: UK, 2004), 266-267.

⁸² In, Lakeland it was the Eastside taken through Urban Renewal. For St John, it was the church itself, a victim of arson in 2006 and nearly 10 years still lacking the funds to restore the building. And in Freedmen's Town, the forty black district now reduced to six because of gentrification.

⁸³ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early Life*. (Garden City: NY: Anchor Press/Double Day, 1996), 4-5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 213.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Paul Mullins, *Race and Affluence: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture*, (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 30.

⁸⁷ Ibid., v.

⁸⁸ Ibid., vi.

⁸⁹ Deetz asserts, that despite the intended purpose of those who produce, the consumed object can take on multiple forms and functions as it passes through the hands of human use. Multivalence, in which "objects can have a range of possible meanings drawn from a circumscribed range of symbolic possibilities," also plays an influential role in how significance is structured (and at times manipulated and manufactured) to gain visibility in the field of historic preservation.

⁹⁰ What does the preservation of these sites suggest about the lived experiences of African Americans during the Jim Crow Era. Why is their presence in the historical narrative imperative to understanding the totalizing effects on Jim Crow laws as well as the thriving and dynamic African American community that existed in spite of such laws? My dissertation seeks to tease out some of these issues, and address the ways in which the everyday landscape is a site of historical significance in marginalized African American communities.

⁹¹ Denkler joins a host of archeologists, material culturalists and anthropologist scholars that grapple with this immaterial culture extensively. Several different streams of scholarship emerged in the 1970s that challenged older notions of significance of objects in constructing historical narratives. Beaudry, Cook and Mrozowski note in "Artifacts and Active Voices," "interpretive approaches in anthropology are characterized by attention to belief systems or world views and by a concern for meaning within its cultural and historical contexts; culture is seen as meaningfully constituted, cultural facts as observations subject to multiple interpretations" (274). The interpretation of the object is based largely on an interpretive approach involving "several recent trends in human sciences: semiotics and the study of symbolism, sociological and anthropological theories of social action and social discourse; and detailed construction of the historical and cultural context of the artifact use through a critical reading of cultural contexts" (275).

⁹² Ann Denkler, *Sustaining Identity, Recapturing Heritage: Exploring Issues of Public History, Tourism, and Race in a Southern Town*, (Lexington Books: UK,

⁹³ Denkler utilizes oral history testimony, census data, ethnography, historical maps and cultural landscape analysis to examine heritage narratives in Luray, a small historic Southern American town.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁵ Clyde Woods and Katherine McKittrick eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), 3.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁸ The communities I study in this dissertation exist at the intersection of race and class.

⁹⁹ LouAnn Wurst offers three definitions of class in "Internalizing Class in Historical Archaeology." "First, as an objective group, class [is] a discrete social or economic category. Second, as a rank, class [is] a relative social position by birth or mobility. Third, as a formation, class is based on perspective economic relationship; social political and cultural organization." These definitions have helped scholars approach the study of class within a historical context, but class in its abstract form proves much more difficult to see. "In the abstract, we can define class in terms of bearers or agents of social relations, but cannot specify what form class will take in any particular context...By defining different class structures through abstractions of extension, levels of generality, and vantage point, we bring into focus aspects of the totality of social relations that would otherwise be invisible."⁹⁹

¹⁰⁰ David Delaney, *Race, Place and the Law, 1836-1948*, (Austin, University of Texas Press), 5.

¹⁰¹ In Texas for example, Black codes provided the legal precedent to continue to limit African American citizenship rights. In 1866 Texas passed a series of codes that allowed political power to remain in the hands of whites. Historian Miriam Williams writes in *Black codes to Recodification: Removing the Veil from Regulatory Writing* that, "The bulk of Texas Black codes promoted unfair labor contracts between white Texans and freed blacks, which provided little legal protection for employees of freedmen; vagrancy laws, which served as a means of forcing unemployed freed slaves into unfair employment contracts, and the worst of the codes—apprentice codes—that forced black children into "guardianships" with white Texans to serve as 'a cheap source of labor'" Black codes coyly and intentionally left out mentions of race but, as Crouch further illustrates, 'the content of the codes were indeed written to regulate the activities of blacks and were borrowed from the 'harshest of code from those that had been previously legislated by the five other states'" (16).

¹⁰² Byrne, Denis R. "Nervous landscapes race and space in Australia." *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2003): 169-193.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Randall H. McGuire & Robert Paynter, eds. *The Archeology of Inequality*, (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Built environments that racialize and gender spaces offer one good example of how domination strategies structure our material world. In chapter three of *The Archeology of Inequality* Charles E. Orser Jr. explores the resistive practices of freed blacks in the South between 1865 and 1875 in which the exodus from the plantation home marked a strong act of resistance against their status as enslaved human beings and their former white slave holders. The southern plantation was a space in which racial and gendered hierarchies were written into the landscape, and social space was clearly defined across these lines. The very layout of the plantation lays claim to these divisions of space, in which whites made their dominance known to all who stepped foot on the land. However, this act of black resistance did not detour white plantation owners from reinstating their plantation system under the guise of sharecropping during Reconstruction and well into the 20th century.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁸ Though this dissertation does not singularly address resistance through food, the scholarship of Psyche Williams-Forsen and Doris Witt further develop this line of inquiry.

¹⁰⁹ Cheryl LaRoche and Michael Blakely, "Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground," *Historical Archaeology* 31:3 (1997): 84.

¹¹⁰ Through the excavation of the site, issues emerge involving various stakeholders and their sociopolitical agendas, the language of interpretation, and which archives would house the excavated remains.

¹¹¹ Their comprehensive research plan integrates the most contemporary scientific approaches and African-American intellectual traditions" (87).

¹¹² Moving chronologically allows the reader to watch the preservation process unfold in a similar order as I witnessed during the study. Ultimately, my hope is that navigating through the project in this manner will evoke some of the same feelings of excitement, anxiety, frustration, concern and finally understanding that I experienced as a participant observer within the preservation organization.

¹¹³ I consider my role as researcher and my positionality as stakeholder in relation to others involved in the preservation of these communities in order to understand the intersections of research and activism.

¹¹⁴ <https://lakelandchp.com/history/>

¹¹⁵ As a former slaveholding state, Maryland's the racial landscape shares an eerily familiar history of violent outrages as Texas. Comparing a Maryland freedom colony to Texas freedom colonies allowed me to examine the ways in which slavery affected the freed populations and settlement during the late nineteenth century.

¹¹⁶ "Lakeland East of the Rail Road Tracks 1890-1970: A Historical Report," Prepared by the students of AMST 629D/ HIST 635 in Cooperation with The Lakeland Community Heritage Project, June 2010.

¹¹⁷ I researched the Lakeland community for eighteen months starting in June 2009 through December of 2010. During this time, I served as graduate researcher, LCHP member and led a trolley tour through portions of the community as part of the 2010 Heritage Weekend Celebration.

¹¹⁸ The census reported 11,510 slaves and 1,138 freed blacks were living in Prince George's County, Maryland in 1850, 12, 479 slaves and 1,198 free blacks in 1860s, 9,780 colored persons in 1870 and 12, 846 colored persons in 1880. The 1870 broke down the enslaved population even further, to include age groups for men and women who could read and write, as well as how many freed men and women were attending school in 1870. The 1880 census only identified the number of colored and white persons living in the county, with no additional break down of literacy or school attendance.

<http://slavery.msa.maryland.gov/html/research/census1880.html>

¹¹⁹ In his 1990 book *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* Pete Daniel coins the term "Shadow of Slavery" to mean the long term effects of slavery on African American communities in the South.

¹²⁰ It is within this historical context that new communities emerged to house and service Maryland's African American population. De facto and de jure segregation created a deeply segregated racial landscape. The threat and force of violence kept African Americans in tight communal clusters adjacent to, and rarely integrated within, white communities.

¹²¹ Property ownership meant protection under the law from trespass and signified a beginning of independence for black communities.

¹²² For example, the journal of Adam Plummer, a former slave owned by Charles Benedict Calvert (one of the founders of the University of Maryland) gives us a glimpse into the lives of slaves (and later freedmen) living and working in Prince George's County Maryland. The journal is currently housed at the Anacostia historical museum. *Knowing Our History*, A 2009 yearlong historical research project conducted by Dr. Ira Berlin and his HIST 429 cites Francis Plummer, as one of the founders of the University. Plummer's family homestead, situated just a few miles from the University in Hyattsville, was purchased in 1868 and erected in the summer and fall of 1870. Plummer paid a total of 505.00 for the 8 acres of land and the diary notes that as late as 1916 the family still "owned and loved the spot." Given the close proximity of the family plot to Lakeland and taking into account the overlap in the Plummer family timeline with Lakeland's founding, it is likely that the Plummer family passed through Lakeland to conduct business and socialize with other African American homesteaders. The diary pays mention to monies paid to the Plummer family in exchange for moving a family cemetery to make way for the B & O Railroad. This same railroad is mentioned in oral history testimony from Lakelanders as a source of "communication, transportation and employment for the residents of the area."

¹²³ Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad. *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 1.

¹²⁴ In Chapter One of *Places of Their Own* Andrew Wiese traces early African American suburbanization from 1900 to 1940, noting that African Americans often occupied the cheap, nuisance-prone land, were "geographically cut off by railroad tracks or other physical barriers" and lacked basic infrastructure (17).

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- ¹²⁵ Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: Andrew Wiese, African American Urbanization in the 20th Century*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 18.
- ¹²⁶ Lakeland Community Heritage Project, *Lakeland History Project, Scholars Guide* (Xeroxed booklet). (College Park, Maryland, 2002), 2.
- ¹²⁷ Image 13, last edition," *The Washington Times*, 19th April 1897, 9. 13. Qtd. from Lakeland East of the Rail Road Tracks 1890-1970: A Historical Report Prepared by the Students of AMST 629D/ HIST 635 in Cooperation with The Lakeland Community Heritage Project, June 2010.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., 22.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid., 16.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid.
- ¹³¹ Targeted violence against African Americans, institutionalized racism, the establishment of the all-white primary, literacy tests and poll taxes were part of the everyday experiences during the era of Jim Crow. The necessity for black community cohesion was especially critical during a time in which attempting to integrate public spaces could cost you your life.
- ¹³² Ibid., 17.
- ¹³³ Ibid.
- ¹³⁴ Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877–1901*, (New York, The Dial Press Inc.), 1954.
- ¹³⁵ For Sale Ad, *The Washington Times*, May 1, 1907, p.10. Qtd. from Lakeland East of the Rail Road Tracks 1890-1970: A Historical Report Prepared by the Students of AMST 629D/ HIST 635 in Cooperation with The Lakeland Community Heritage Project, June 2010.
- ¹³⁶ <http://lakelandchp.com/history/>
- ¹³⁷ The Johnsons and the Brooks are noted as purchasing homesteads in the eastern section of Lakeland, while the Gray home served as the post office and rail stop in 1909 and a one room school house for elementary age children from 1909-1917.
- ¹³⁸ <https://lakelandchp.com/about/>
- ¹³⁹ It is worth noting that LCHP continues to collect information from community members and decedents of the founders at their annual heritage weekend celebration in September.
- ¹⁴⁰ This chapter specifically focuses on the ways in which Lakeland utilized oral history testimony and personal photographs to construct their archive. Church and school records and Deed Research, as well as Historical Map analysis and census data will be fleshed out as effective instrument in grassroots preservation toolkits in chapter three and four respectively.
- ¹⁴¹ Faye Brown. Presentation at SWATH workshop, July 11, 2014.
- ¹⁴² She also filled this with various household projects and crafts, mostly through the use of recycled materials, and would spend a lot of time in her garden.
- ¹⁴³ The Lakeland Community Heritage Project, Inc., *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park*, (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2009,) 7.
- ¹⁴⁴ Hayden addresses the recent surge in preservation efforts in marginalized communities writing, "debates about the built environment, history and culture take place in much more contested terrain of race, gender, and class, set against long term economic and environmental problems, especially in the large cities of the United States" (6).
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁴⁶ This is not uncommon when collecting oral histories. In *Freedom Colonies* the authors' notes, "'only in the living memories of elderly community residents did the vein of information run deep, but many researchers and many interviewers felt uncomfortable with the practice of oral history across racial and cultural lines. Quite understandably, social awkwardness and lingering suspicions often haunted such interactions. The elderly African Americans whose memories embodied the historical knowledge had lived half their lives under the full force of Jim Crow" (4).
- ¹⁴⁷ Alex Haley notes that in the back country, and in the older villages of the back country, there were old men called griots, who were in effect walking, living archives of oral history" in "Black History, Oral History and Genealogy"—Reprinted in the oral history reader edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson.

¹⁴⁸ Alessandro Portelli states in "What Makes Oral History Different," in the standard question and answer format of oral history "researcher often introduce specific distortions; informants tell them what they want to be told and thus reveal who they think the researcher is. On the other hand, rigidly structured interviews may exclude elements whose existence or relevance were previously unknown to the interviewer and not contemplated in the question schedule. Such interviews tend to confirm the historian's previous frame of reference" (39).

¹⁴⁹ For example, when the interviewee mentions a place, person or significant event that helped shape Lakeland's history, the interviewer can flesh out the informant's point by conducting further research once the interview concludes. At times this includes archival research, but more often than not it means connecting the informant's story to other Lakeland narratives collected for the project.

¹⁵⁰ In "Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes and Possibilities," Linda Shopes warns against the "celebratory impulse [that] infects many community interviews... The causes of this are manifold and reflect the deeply social nature of oral historical inquiry: a community insider, interviewing a peer, does not want to risk disturbing an ongoing, comfortable social relationship by asking difficult or challenging questions...[or] a project seeking to affirm a group that has been socially marginalized decides that it would be disrespectful to air problematic or unsavory aspects of the community's history that reinforce stereotypes" (264). I witnessed this phenomenon first hand while conducting research in Lakeland and asked some informants about "playing the numbers" at the general store, the juke joint that was once located in Lakeland and the lasting effects of Urban Renewal on community politics.

¹⁵¹ As discussed earlier in the chapter, there was a myriad of reasons some community members chose to decline an interview included lack of interest in reliving Lakeland's past, failing health, relocation and intrapolitical community issues.

¹⁵² These edited volumes are useful in examining the archive creation model and the ways in which researchers can decrease their presence in oral history collection by giving the informants active voice in narrating their stories. There is no paraphrasing or ahistoricizing of the interviews. Instead, the strategy of the editors was to keep the interviews in their entirety and simply remove the "ums, uhs and pauses" of the regional vernacular.

¹⁵³ William H. Chafe, *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South*. (New York: New Press, 2001), 3.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Unlike LCHP's oral history project, Behind the veil was grant funded and supported by a major research university. Each summer for three years, Duke University trained graduate students to conduct oral history interviews with elderly members of African American communities in the surrounding counties. The students lived in the community of interest for two weeks and at the end of their residency transcribed the conducted interviews to include in the Behind the Veil research project's archive. Willingness to identify potential interviewees from the communities of interest, external grant funding and institutional support all contributed to the creating of the archive and the success of the project. During its infancy, LCHP only had the resources of community volunteers. It was not until late that they partnered with the University of Maryland.

¹⁵⁶ Anne Valk and Leslie Brown. *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South*, (New York: Palmgrave Macmillian, 2011,) 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵⁸ Behind the Veil project also provides an example of the successful collaboration of several facets of the community into a single local history project. The collective efforts of community preservation organizations, educational institutions, and external grant funding sources appear to aid in the visibility and the success of the project. Though it is noted that there were smaller, more localized efforts to preserve community history, the assistance and resources of Duke University propelled the project into the limelight, and from the collaboration over 1200 interviews were collected and a quarter of these transcribed. The fully developed research project that became Behind the Veil was funded by NEH grants and University seed money. The expertise of the research coordinators and the man hours of the graduate students over a span of three years also contributed to the group effort. Duke University's

Behind the Veil provides an example of what a successful collaborative research project between educational institutions and community preservation groups can achieve given the space and resources.

¹⁵⁹ Looking back now, it's hard to recall the details of many of those stories. What sticks with me still today was the feeling of belonging that overcame me. I was drawn into their lives every time they shared a story.

¹⁶⁰ The Lakeland Community Heritage Project, Inc., *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park*, (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2009,) 7.

¹⁶¹ These were questions that perhaps are more difficult to address than space would permit in this dissertation, but they are worth noting and considering for other preservation groups interested in creating a community archive; who is at the table when these preliminary discussions are taking place? In what ways could the archive be more inclusive of the mosaic of narratives that shape the community's history?

¹⁶² As a scholar of material culture, I strive to pull back the *layers of meanings of objects* in order to explore how culture is taken up within each object made, kept, destroyed and forgotten. That being said, the inclusion or intentional absence of certain images within the archive is indicative of the narrative the organizing group desires to put forth.

¹⁶³ This image is actually representative of the middle third of the panoramic picture included in Chapter Two, "The Key to the Dream." In the panoramic, the twenty-one children are pictured (17 girls and 4 boys).

¹⁶⁴ The Lakeland Community Heritage Project, Inc., *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park*, (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2009,) 27.

¹⁶⁵ From 1903-1925 the school was a one room schoolhouse.

¹⁶⁶ An Abridged Guide to Lakeland's History, (Xeroxed booklet), 4.

¹⁶⁷ Prince George's County had to address the growing demand for facilities to accommodate African American population growth, while also adhering to the law of the land. They did this by consolidating facilities in outlying areas and building newer schools in central located and/or densely populated areas.

¹⁶⁸ In Lakeland, the segregated Paint Branch Elementary School was the source of a lawsuit brought forth by the Lomax family in an attempt to enroll their son in the segregated school. The Lomaxes won the lawsuit and ultimately, Prince George's County schools integrated in 1972.

¹⁶⁹ An excerpt from the unanimously approved opinion authored by Justice Earl Warren stated, "We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment."

¹⁷⁰ This is discussed in "An Abridged Guide to Lakeland History," the United States Commission on Civil Rights 1976. "A Long Day's Journey's into Light: School Desegregation in Prince George's County, Washington: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights."

¹⁷¹ This was made clear to me while collecting the oral history testimonies during the graduate course, *Social and Ethic Issues in Historic Preservation* in fall 2009.

¹⁷² An Abridged Guide to Lakeland's History, (Xeroxed booklet) Urban Renewal.

¹⁷³ Despite Lakelanders paying city taxes, their community seldom received municipal services from College Park.

¹⁷⁴ An Abridged Guide to Lakeland's History, (Xeroxed booklet) Urban Renewal.

¹⁷⁵ According to "An Abridged Guide to Lakeland's History," a 1965 report published by a planning consulting firm, 62 of the 141 livable structures in Lakeland were "unfit".

¹⁷⁶ Four additional images illustrate either buildings that are still intact (such as the AME and Baptist Churches), the extent of flooding experienced by Lakelanders, or the construction of low and middle income townhomes in the 1980s.

¹⁷⁷ Lakeland's west side—public housing units and townhomes. What remains in Lakeland today from the original settlement are the two churches, Lakeland High School (now repurposed as a Brazilian-

Washington Seven Day Adventist Church) and a collection of single family homes clusters in central Lakeland.

¹⁷⁸ Joanne Braxton, *Geographies and Psychic Landscapes: Hegemonic discourses of Urban Renewal in the case for Billy Weems v. the City of College Park, Maryland.* In *Keep your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 185.

¹⁷⁹ *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park*, 119.

¹⁸⁰ It is my understanding that Weems was Dr. Braxton's brother, who, they say, died of a broken heart after his beloved neighborhood hangout, "the cut" was bulldozed as part of the Lakeland Urban Renewal Plan.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 190

¹⁸⁴ LCHP oral history workshop, 2009.

¹⁸⁵ I borrow from Toni Morrison's concept of "home" to mean a place that stands at the crossroads of cultural knowledge production within critical race theory. I wish to build upon Morrison's concept of Home, and use the remaining time and space to demonstrate how a theoretical a discussion of home runs parallel with the thematic focus of this essay, the cultures of everyday lives, historic preservation and marginalized communities. The home Morrison speaks of is a structurally sound and authentic site of identity formation, even as it continues to be battered by the racist, sexist, hetero-patriarchal and exploitive elements of the outside world.

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.findingsources.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/jimcrowlawsmaryland.pdf>

¹⁸⁷ Evidence of socialization within the community included constrictions of class consciousness as exemplified through the Elks organization and colorism.

¹⁸⁸ LCHP oral history workshop, 2009.

¹⁸⁹ M-NCPPC is a bi-county organization serving Montgomery and Prince George's County to help "forward-looking community leaders who saw the need to plan for orderly development and protection of the natural resources in the two suburban counties bordering the District of Columbia." The organization originated in 1927 and has since assumed "responsibility for the entire public recreation program in Prince George's County in the '70s, to building and strengthening ongoing regional business partnerships, the Commission has continued to plan, fund and deliver quality, innovative programs, facilities and services for over three-quarters of a century."

¹⁹⁰ http://www.mncppc.org/About_M-NCPPC/Our_Vision.html

¹⁹¹ Sandy Point Beach flier, LCHP July 9, 2013.

¹⁹² <https://lakelandchp.com/?s=beach>

¹⁹³ The ways in which significance is defined, and often denied, to African American communities is covered extensively in Chapter One.

¹⁹⁴ Many churches within the communities had cornerstones that detailed the founders of the congregation and provided details of the church's early history.

¹⁹⁵ To a lesser extent, community members transmitted their cultural memories of these places through oral tradition.

¹⁹⁶ <http://mdihp.net/index.cfm>

¹⁹⁷ Another prominent registry is the Maryland Register of Historic Places. This registry provides funding and resources for preservation projects in Maryland. At the conclusion of this study, there were no African American historic sites from Prince George's County (where Lakeland is located) included in on the register.

¹⁹⁸ The database provided images and PDFs of each property included and fifty-five windshield surveys. http://www.pgplanning.org/Projects/Ongoing_Plans_and_Projects/Historic_Preservation/Historic_Sites/HSDP_Survey_Database.htm

¹⁹⁹ http://www.mncppc.org/About_M-NCPPC/Our_Vision.html

²⁰⁰ http://issuu.com/mncppc/docs/hsdp_approved_book_for_web?e=2864017/3595552#search

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- ²⁰¹ The Lakeland Historic Community (66-000) was already included as a historic site on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Places.
- ²⁰² http://issuu.com/mncppc/docs/hsdp_approved_book_for_web?e=2864017/3595552#search
- ²⁰³ https://mht.maryland.gov/research_nationalregister.shtml
- ²⁰⁴ These are the dates included in the historical significance discussions of the seven properties included, implying that these are the dates that state historians have qualified as an era of significance.
- ²⁰⁵ <http://focus.nps.gov/nrhp/SearchResults/b6518370e8f544bf97b354f8370b019e?page=1&view=list>
- ²⁰⁶ <http://mht.maryland.gov/nr/NRCountyList.aspx?FROM=NRPickCounty.aspx&COUNTY=Prince%20Georg>
[es](http://mht.maryland.gov/nr/NRCountyList.aspx?FROM=NRPickCounty.aspx&COUNTY=Prince%20Georg)
- ²⁰⁷ Prince George's County had a large African American population from 1850-1880, the two proceeding generations proceeding the period of Lakeland settlement. The census reported 11,510 slaves and 1,138 freed blacks were living in Prince George's County, Maryland in 1850, 12, 479 slaves and 1,198 free blacks in 1860s, 9,780 colored persons in 1870 and 12, 846 colored persons in 1880.
- ²⁰⁸ The John C. Johnson Elementary School was unfortunately torn down shortly after as a part of urban renewal.
- ²⁰⁹ Lakeland historical marker application, Maryland Register of Historic Properties, 1983.
- ²¹⁰ The Maryland Historic Trust website notes, "A Maryland Inventory form provides a description of historic resource and discusses its history but the MIHP is not a regulatory instrument..."
- ²¹¹ PG 66-13 survey number for Maryland Historic Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form section 8 significance.
- ²¹² Ibid.
- ²¹³ Ibid.
- ²¹⁴ Ibid.
- ²¹⁵ PG 66-14 survey number for Maryland Historic Trust State Historic Sites inventory form section 7 description. The Bowie School reference number included in the description suggests that the school was already provided historic designation from the Maryland Historic Trust and thus, because the Lakeland school is nearly identical, should also be considered for historic designation and protection.
- ²¹⁶ The National Trust for Historic Preservation notes in "Preserving Rosenwald Schools," from 1912 to 1932 the Rosenwald building program spread access to education across the south. "By 1928 one in every five rural schools in the South was a Rosenwald school; these schools housed one third of the region's rural black schoolchildren and teachers. At the program's conclusion in 1932, it had produced 4,977 schools, 217 teachers' homes, and 163 shop buildings that served 663,625 students in 15 states. Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Fund contributed more than \$4.3 million, and African American communities raised more than \$4.7 million." The report notes that 149 Rosenwald schools were built in Maryland. None are listed on the Maryland Register of Historic Places in Prince George's County.
http://stanlycountymuseum.com/wp-content/uploads/PB_Rosenwald_final_revised2012.pdf
- ²¹⁷ PG 66-14 survey number for Maryland Historic Trust State historic sites inventory form section 8 significance.
- ²¹⁸ The application notes the Board assured the community of "its appreciation of this evidence of splendid cooperation."
- ²¹⁹ The necessity to build educational facilities for black children was an overarching theme throughout the Reconstruction Era and early 20th century. The lack of resources made it difficult for each community to have its own high school, but the necessity of educating the younger children was met with a surge in private home school and public one room schoolhouse construction.
- ²²⁰ According to the inventory form, Lakeland Community School constructed with Rosenwald funds for the advancement of the surrounding African American communities of Prince George's County including, Bladensburg, Brentwood, North Brentwood, Lakeland, Ammendale, Muirkirk and Laurel.
- ²²¹ The application was submitted in January and denied in April 2012.
- ²²² https://mht.maryland.gov/projectreview_DOEGuide.shtml
- ²²³ https://mht.maryland.gov/projectreview_DOEGuide.shtml
- ²²⁴ Lakeland designation application (KCI Technologies 1999a).

²²⁵ http://mdihp.net/dsp_county.cfm?search=county&id=32093&viewer=true&updated=Y&criteria1=L&criteria2=PG

²²⁶ The report was submitted on January 17, 2012. Sarah Truem and Courtney Clark are listed as the preparers of the report. They did not recommend Lakeland for eligibility on the register. The MHT did not do a site visit in Lakeland.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ There was no follow up application or additional attempt to gain historic designation from MHT on record at the conclusion of my research.

²²⁹ See assessment for full list of effects on historic properties.

http://montgomeryplanning.org/transportation/purple_line/mandatory_referral/documents/submissions/E%20-%20Historic%20-%20Section%20106%20Effects%20Tech%20Report.pdf

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ The eligibility form is meant to determine historical significance, or in this case, *insignificance*.

²³² http://montgomeryplanning.org/transportation/purple_line/mandatory_referral/documents/submissions/E%20-%20Historic%20-%20Section%20106%20Effects%20Tech%20Report.pdf

²³³ However, in the 2012 eligibility application the MHT staff comments, “The Lakeland (Rosenwald) High School may be independently eligible. Future research should determine the NR eligibility of the high school.”

http://mdihp.net/dsp_county.cfm?search=county&id=32093&viewer=true&updated=Y&criteria1=L&criteria2=PG

²³⁴ The local and state agencies that designate significance must work in tandem with communities on the margins to ensure that their stories are told. In Lakeland’s case, an early application to MHT in 1983 by Susan Pearl, a Lakeland resident and later LCHP member, as well as the assistance of Eli Pusson’s research in the early 2000s helped Lakeland secure some recognition through MHT and M-NCPPC. Though their research is not directly addressed in this chapter, their efforts are not less important to Lakeland’s preservation narrative.

²³⁵ It is suggested that Thelma Lomax was a large contributor to the verbiage of this marker, particularly because urban renewal of the 1970s was framed as a “successful program” of the visionary Dervey Lomax.

²³⁶ From the City of College Park press release, <http://www.berwyn-heights.com/meetings/090511bws.htm>

²³⁷ Dervey Lomax’s late wife, Thelma Lomax, had, as late as 2008, held documents concerning Lakeland’s urban renewal plans in her basement. As I was told, Mrs. Lomax was apprehensive about sharing the documents with LCHP in fear the documents may paint Dervey Lomax in a negative light.

²³⁸ Steven B. Burg, “from Troubled Ground to Common Ground”: The Locust Grove African American Cemetery Restoration Project: A Case Study of Service-learning and Community History.” *The Public Historian* 30.2 (2008): 51–82.

²³⁹ It was unclear at the conclusion of this study why Ms. Metaferia was selected as the muralist, but oral history testimony from members of LCHP noted their apprehension in someone “outside” the community being the final candidate. Metaferia’s expertise in working with communities and her talent are likely the reasons she was ultimately selected over other local artists. None the less, he selection was a politicized decision for many in LCHP and the Lakeland community.

²⁴⁰ UMD Good Neighbor Day is a volunteer service day that seeks to build lasting relationships with the citizens of College Park through community outreach and beautification projects.

²⁴¹ <https://lakelandchp.com/2013/04/19/help-find-a-home-for-the-lakeland-mural/>

²⁴² The choice to include the Maryland “M” on the mural suggests LCHP wanted to highlight UMD as a contributor to the success of the community over its history. According to oral history testimony the Maryland “M” was designed by a Lakelander. While the university has historically provided employment opportunity for Lakelanders as early as 1910, UMD did not open its doors to African American students until many decades later. Oral history testimonies taken in *Social and Ethic Issues in Historic Preservation* site most Lakelanders had to attend college out of state because UMD did not extend admission to African American students as late as the 1960s.

²⁴³ <http://vpaf.umd.edu/gnd/>

²⁴⁴ Dr. Mary Corbin Sies notes that the relationship between LCHP, the American Studies department and the Historic Preservation program at the University of Maryland is “an ongoing relationship that is still active. There is also a relationship with the School of Public Health at the University of Maryland.

²⁴⁵ This is not the first collaborative effort LCHP has engaged. In 2008 M-NCPPC and LCHP teamed up to create *A View from the Lakes: A History of African Americans in College Park*. This exhibit was curated from the images and oral history testimonies in the LCHP community archive. In 2013 it became a permanent exhibit in 2011.

²⁴⁶ Steven B. Burg, “from Troubled Ground to Common Ground”: The Locust Grove African-American Cemetery Restoration Project: A Case Study of Service-learning and Community History.” *The Public Historian* 30.2 (2008): 51–82.

²⁴⁷ Harriette Pipes McAdoo, *Black Families*, (New York: Sage Publications, 2007), 17.

²⁴⁸ The preservation of family and community history becomes even more important as family members die and heritage sites are demolished as a result to urban renewal. In addition to the emotional and psychological anguish experienced, there is also an increased urgency to record family and community history before it is lost forever. Through the memorialization of dead spaces, condemned spaces, and places of trauma, community preservationists utilized various methods, both archival and repertory, to save spaces under threat of erasure.

²⁴⁹ NLT. Matthew 16:18.

²⁵⁰ Historically, African American churches are seen as nuclei for spiritual development. They are widely acknowledged as offering emotional and physical enrichment through community outreach and ministry and are valuable sites of cultural sustainability and identity construction. Churches bring a sense of belonging and comfort to their members. African American churches have served as political organizing centers and refuges for battle-worn soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement. They are situated at an intersection of the blended environment where social, cultural, political and spiritual landscapes coalesce.

²⁵¹ <http://www.stjohnmbcmisouricity.org/letter-to-community.html>

²⁵² Couple this with the aging demographic of the St. John congregation and the urgency of restoring a church that was literally falling apart, the research conducted for the church was a hodge podge of guesswork and hunches.

²⁵³ Thad Sitton, James H. Conrad, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2005).

²⁵⁴ In chapter one of *Places of Their Own* Andrew Wiese traces early African American suburbanization from 1900 to 1940, noting that African Americans often occupied the cheap, nuisance-prone land, were “geographically cut off by railroad tracks or other physical barriers” and lacked basic infrastructure (17).

²⁵⁵ In a personal statement from Gabriel Cuellar, a volunteer architect who specializes in historic preservation, notes the importance of saving the Church, stating, “as one of the few remaining features of the historical landscape of the Southern United States, the building can serve as a means to mediate and enliven political, social, and urban-architectural discussions in the region.”

²⁵⁶ Irene Hayes, personal interview, October 31, 2014.

²⁵⁷ If there was a community of African Americans worshiping on the Dewalt plantation prior to 1869, and particularly during the period of bondage, their spiritual community illustrates one example of the strategic negotiations of power that many employed to subvert the totalizing effects of slavery. In many cases slave owners did not allow African Americans to congregate without overseer supervision because they considered African American spiritual spaces as dangerous hotbeds of rebellion. However, African Americans continued to meet in secrecy on the Sabbath in swamps, wooded clearings and at far reaches of the plantation to worship freely. In this way, enslaved African American created new avenues of freedom despite the physical, emotional, and psychological bondage imposed upon them.

²⁵⁸ Green Woods is listed in the 1870 census as being 69 years old black farmer from South Carolina. He is literate, can write and has a personal estate valued at 378 dollars. In the 1867 voter registration Woods is identified as being a resident of the state and Fort Bend County for 27 years. Greene woods is also listed on the 1880 census as being 98 years old, and living with a 26-year-old son and his wife (Matilda). He listed occupation is “old age” and there is a mulatto female (aged 75) living in the house as well. Alfred

Woods, is listed in the 1870 census as being 36-year-old blacksmith who can read and write. Alfred's personal estate was valued at 150 dollars in 1870. In the 1867 voter registration records he is noted as being a resident of the county for 22 years. He is unlikely the son of Green.

²⁵⁹ Thomas Waters Dewalt account book, Daughters of the Texas Revolution Alamo Archives, San Antonio Texas.

²⁶⁰ By 1870 the Dewalt had acquired \$25,000 dollars' worth of real estate and \$11,000 personal property. His wife Charlotte, then 27, had given birth to two boys, Thomas (7) and Daniel (8).

²⁶¹ It is likely Grace migrated with her husband from South Carolina to Texas in the 1850s. Both Grace and Green are identified as South Carolina natives in the 1870 census.

²⁶² A tense exchange is described in the account book between Thomas Waters Dewalt and Rachel Wood [sic] and reveals the everyday resistance strategies of freedwomen during the early years of freedom. After marrying Alfred Wood [sic] in January of 1867, Rachel enters into a domestic labor contract with the Dewalt Family. On February 24 she is fined \$5.00 for missing 20 days of work and later, on April 4 Dewalt writes that Rachel refuses to "cook on Sundays" for the Dewalt household. Rachel was fined by Dewalt \$2.00 on April 4 for "neglecting and refusing to cook on Sundays." On April 25, 1867 Dewalt writes, "Rachel quit work inclusive" and on May 1 she "moved to McGowan place," presumably because the Sunday work hours could not be agreed upon (Thomas Waters Dewalt Account book, 1866-1876, page 33).

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ The 1870 census and Fort Bend County tax rolls notes Alfred Woods among one of the few African American property owners in the county. His 1873 acquisition of property from Dewalt is likely in addition to the property he already owned in the county.

²⁶⁵ Probate and census records suggest that four slaves (2 male and 2 female) were willed to Thomas Waters Dewalt from his father upon his death. Some of the Woods ancestors likely came to Texas with Thomas Waters Dewalt in 1855.

²⁶⁶ David Bright was the original chain survey for Stephen F. Austin. His league of land was granted to him by Austin as part of his years of services. Bright is one of the "Old 300," the nickname given to the original 300 families that came with Austin to Mexican Texas in the 1820s and 30s.

²⁶⁷ Research suggests that Dewalt served in the Mexican American War sometime between 1847 and 1848.

²⁶⁸ His father, Daniel Dewalt, is listed as owning twenty one slaves ranging in age from four months to forty years old, with 66% of the slaves living being of childhood age in the 1850 slave schedules. Thomas' Grandfather, Daniel Dewalt fought in the Revolutionary War and in 1806, the year of his death, he had amassed 2851 acres of land and willed his children 11 slaves, with the remaining slaves and being willed to his wife (Thomas Waters Dewalt's Grandmother), Nancy Dewalt.

²⁶⁹ Newberry Co., SC., Probate Records, estate of Daniel Dewalt (1853).

²⁷⁰ A February 24, 1847 bill of sale identifies Dewalt as the seller of a fourteen year old girl, Ann, to John Owens for \$525.00.²⁷⁰ The only descriptor for Ann is "dark."

<http://www.afrigenas.com/forumd/index.cgi/md/read/id/10072/sbj/bill-of-sales-from-fort-bend-county-texas/>

²⁷¹ Newberry Co., SC., Probate Records, estate of Daniel Dewalt (1853).

²⁷² S.S. Louisiana slave manifest, February 12, 1853.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ This fact is demonstrated in the purchase cost of slaves and the widespread use of slave ownership and leased labor. The cost of slaves rose steadily in Texas leading up the Civil War and even spiked during the early years of the war as slave labor was utilized for military purposes (digging trenches, cooking, during the dead etc). The price of slave began to decline in 1863 as the state experienced an influx of slave owners fleeing the occupied regions of the confederacy and looking to gain a quick return in the Texas markets. Ironically, Southern slave owners "flooded the market" with the very human capital the Confederacy sought to protect ownership of.

²⁷⁵ According to the citation for census records, the slave population on his plantation ranged from six months to thirty-five years old.

²⁷⁶ By 1860 Fort Bend County ranked second in the state for the most African enslaved African Americans, second only to Brazoria County.

²⁷⁷ Galveston Daily News, (Galveston, Tex.), Vol. 17, No. 37, Ed. 1, Tuesday, December 18, 1860.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Tax rolls further demonstrate the trajectory of Dewalt's estate from 1849 until 1874. The first time Dewalt appears on the 1849 tax roll notes that Dewalt's owned 1080 acres of land valued at 1350.00 dollars. He is not listed as owning any slaves despite being listed as the seller of Ann on the 1847 bill of sale referenced earlier. Twenty-two slaves are listed on the 1863 tax rolls, valued at 14,000 dollars. The Fort Bend tax rolls show Dewalt continued to acquire property through the 1864. The 1861 tax rolls states he owned 17 slaves valued at 10,200.00 dollars, and in 1862 he owned twenty one slaves valued at 13,600 dollars.²⁸⁰ In 1863, Dewalt owned 2000 acres valued at 16,000.00 dollars. A separate real estate category indicates Dewalt also owned two lots valued at 200.00 dollars in Richmond, Fort Bend's County seat.

²⁸¹ Fort Bend Museum Did you know PDF.

²⁸² Augusta, Georgia Weekly Constitution, 7 June 1865 [quotation]; Clarence R Wharton, Wharton's History of Fort Bend County (San Antonio: Naylor Company, 1939), 173; Yelderman, Jaybirds of Fort Bend County, 39.

²⁸³ http://www.juneteenth.com/general_order_no_3.htm find original source for this

²⁸⁴ Freedmen's Bureau records provide a linear narrative of African American life in Fort Bend County, and substantiate the oral history testimonies of Hayes and Woods.

²⁸⁵ During the preliminary research for the church Deacon Rivers visited the county clerk's office several times to secure the documents about the church. He noted the difficulty questions he was asked by the clerk when requesting the deeds.

²⁸⁶ According to congregant testimonies, during the 1870s and 1880s St. John hosted church activities and celebrations as well as Juneteenth picnics for the African American community.

²⁸⁷ Maps of the Dew holdings and the docent at the Dew house in Kitty Hollow Park suggest this may have been one factor in the church moving locations during its early years.

²⁸⁸ Fort Bend County 1900 Deed Records, Vol. 285, page 18, County Clerk Office, Richmond, Texas. Anna Wigglesworth Cartwright Roberts (1844-1903) daughter of Leonidas and Americus Cartwright, married Benjamin Thomas Roberts (1837-1887), son of Noel Roberts (son of Noel Roberts, Old 300, Fort Bend Co.) and Maria Thomas; the Cartwrights were kinsmen of William Stafford's second wife, Martha Cartwright; Fort Bend County Deed Records 1935 and 1951, County Clerk Office, Richmond, Texas.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 1.

²⁹⁰ Fort Bend County Archives, school district records.

²⁹¹ In 1947 the common school districts in the county were abolished or assigned to different districts as a new system started; St. John' school district was abolished and placed in the Missouri City district.

²⁹² Ibid. (Fort Bend Deed Records, op. cit.)

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Property Assessment Records, undated, Fort Bend County Archives.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 1.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 1.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 2.

³⁰⁰ A more detailed account of the tract is found on page 1 which states the land begins "at the Southeast corner of said William Stafford League extending Westward therefrom along Southern boundary line, from which a line drawn northward and parallel to the East boundary line of said League to a point from which a line drawn Eastward and parallel to the Southern boundaries line of said League point in the East

boundary line of said League from which a line drawn Southward along the East boundary line of said League to place of beginning will give Two (2) acres of land, (save and except the oil, gas, and other mineral thereunder, which said minerals are reserved from this conveyance) the same to be in form of a square

³⁰¹ Texas Laws differentiate between surface rights (the right to farm and build on land) from mineral rights (the right to mine the property.)

³⁰² Deed of sale, Fort Bend Deed Records, December 4, 1935.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ I will discuss the school logs in greater detail in the last section.

³⁰⁶ Fort Bend County Deed Records 1900, Volume 285, Page 18.

³⁰⁷ Pickett's family is listed on the member roll for the church. The nine family members he includes in his oral history are also part of the church rolls provided by the St. John secretary.

³⁰⁸ <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=30505>

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 6

³¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹¹ The three-night celebration included Thursday's Deacon's Boards Night, Friday's Mission Women's Night and Sunday's anniversary celebration with the entire congregation.

³¹² Psyche Williams-Forsen, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food and Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 135-136.

³¹³ Ibid., 144.

³¹⁴ Letter to the editor of *Fort Bend Star* in response to "Let's say Goodbye to the Astrodome," April 24, 2015.

³¹⁵ Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 84.

³¹⁶ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

³¹⁹ Even today, there are members of the congregation that are hesitant to provide additional information and/ or corroborate stories about the church's history. This is in part due to the intrapersonal relationships that existed prior to my engagement in the church.

³²⁰ Personal communication, Rosa Graves.

³²¹ A sense of community belonging that supersedes physical presence is one of the common threads across each of the marginalized communities included in this study.

³²² At some points in my research it seemed the women were engaging in light competition as to who could provide the most useful sources in constructing the historical narrative for the marker application. One such instance involved the 1953 flier (I was only provided a scan) that is mentioned previously in the chapter. I was told, by one of the sisters in the church, that the woman who provided the information did not want the carrier, Ms. Graves, to have the original. She had a grandson scan the document and provided only a copy to Sister Graves, who, when noticing the incorrect date on the historic document, marked the correct calculation in blue ink (figure 3.18)

³²³ The packets included anything from funeral programs, hand written church minutes, copies of fliers, pastoral celebration cards, scraps of written notes, sermon outlines and so on.

³²⁴ The Fort Bend Toll road runs directly behind her home and several large homes surround her homestead. When locating the house, I actually approached the wrong home. When a middle aged white man answered the door I was a little taken aback. I inquired to speak to Mrs. Hayes and, after a moment of bewilderment, he said, "Oh, she lives round back." and immediately shut the door.

³²⁵ Irene Hays, Oral history interview, October 31, 2014.

³²⁶ As I listen to Hayes' account of the totality of institutionalized racism, I am once again in awe of the strength it took to endure those times.

³²⁷ Part of the interview is spent taking a tour around Sister Hayes' homestead. The house was built by hand in the early 1950s. Her husband and some of the men in the community worked together to complete the project. During this time you can image how isolated their lot must have felt; a vast Texas prairie on all sides and a two lane highway about a quarter mile from the house

³²⁸ John Wesley Conely, *History of the Baptist Young Peoples Union of America*, 1913.

<https://archive.org/details/historyofbaptist00conl>

³²⁹ Bernadette Pruitt, *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of African Americans to Houston, 1900-1941*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 111.

³³⁰ *The Houston Informer* (Houston, Tex.), Vol. 5, No. 14, Ed. 1 Saturday, August 25, 1923.

³³¹ Isiah Factor is a news commentator on Fox 26 news who focuses on social justice issues in Houston.

³³² Of the two comments included on the page, both are skeptical that money is actually being donated by to the church for reconstruction, but rather, as one comment suggests, the church secretary is pocketing the money. Not only does this defame the character of Sister Graves, the commenter' pseudonym is Nat Turner, which suggests the blogger may view himself as a vigilante of sorts.

<http://www.isiahfactor.com/2012/08/22/sad-story-fort-bend-county-congregation-forced-to-attend-church-services-in-burned-out-building-in-fear-of-losing-building/>

³³³ <http://www.isiahfactor.com/2012/09/27/the-community-still-finding-ways-to-help-st-john-church/>

³³⁴ <http://www.houstonchronicle.com/neighborhood/fortbend/religion/article/Church-founded-by-freedmen-fights-to-survive-5770279.php>

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ NLV, Matthew 18:19-20.

³³⁷ This was perhaps most evident in the joint efforts to secure funding from donors to rid the church of termites and fire ants, to pay off the debts from the 145-year church anniversary celebration as well as obtaining support from the county historical commission for the historic designation marker.

³³⁸ PV is part of the Texas A & M system. It was opened as a Historically Black institution in 1876 and, along with Texas Southern University, remains of the most active universities to champion African American causes in the state.

³³⁹ LCHP's model of sustainable collaborative projects outlined in chapter two serves as a prime example of the benefits of a long-standing relationship with an educational institution. As it stands. St. John has yet to engage in sustainable partnerships with educational institutions.

³⁴⁰ <http://catalog.pvamu.edu/universitycourses/code/>

³⁴¹ <https://olson.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-pete-olson-al-green-attend-historic-st-john-baptist-church>

³⁴² <http://fbIndependent.com/black-history-month-how-far-have-we-come-in-missouri-city-p9471-89.htm>

³⁴³ <http://www.houstonchronicle.com/neighborhood/fortbend/religion/article/Church-founded-by-freedmen-fights-to-survive-5770279.php>

³⁴⁴ Of the eleven commissioners appointed by the governor at the conclusion of my research there were two white women and one African American man serving as commissioners. There was no Latino or Native American representation of the commission. The agency boasts of its diversity in disciplines amongst agency staff (including archeology, architecture, history, economic development, heritage tourism, public administration, and urban planning).

³⁴⁵ THC accepts applications on a rolling basis, from May 1 to June 15 on a rolling basis.

³⁴⁶ <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers/undertold-markers>

³⁴⁷ Oral histories, a historic building condition assessment report, records from the public school system, census and deed records helped construct the history of the church.

³⁴⁸ The seven scoring criteria are as follows: Diversity of topic for addressing gaps in historical marker program; value of topic as an untold or underrepresented aspect of Texas history; Endangerment level of property, site or topic; Historical or architectural significance; Historical or architectural integrity; Relevance to statewide preservation plan and other THC programs; and CHC support and existing documentation, Diversity among this group of candidates. The three scoring criteria that St. John

performed poorly on were Historical or architectural significance, Historical or architectural integrity and Diversity among this group of candidates.

³⁴⁹ The four additional scoring criteria were: Age (5 point max), State of repair/ Integrity (10 points max), Available documentation and resources (10 points) relevance to the commissions current thematic priorities (15 points max).

³⁵⁰ Austin's "Old 300" are a group of 300 settlers that accompanied Stephen F. Austin to settle in Texas in the 1820s.

³⁵¹ This is in no regard an unusual phenomenon, as many early African American churches and schools were held in the same building and helped to establish similar goals within the communities. It does however, draw our attention to strength and ability of African American communities to endure even the most hostile of circumstances by creating lasting institutions of progress.

³⁵² Freedmen's Bureau Records, Richmond office.

³⁵³ Statement on why this was the strategy suggested by Bettye Annheiser, commissioner chairs and near retiree of the historical commission.

³⁵⁴ The sfaold300.org website states that "by the fall of 1825, sixty-nine of the families in Austin's colony owned slaves, and the 443 slaves in the colony accounted for nearly a quarter of the total population of 1,790. The rich banks of the Brazos proved fertile ground for the expansion of the peculiar institution, and slave ownership was a familiar practice among the settler families.

³⁵⁵ <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbr50>

³⁵⁶ Deed research suggests that several plantations resided within the confines of the Bright league, and hence several African American communities also existed on the land as well.

³⁵⁸ Ironically, or perhaps intentionally, this is the same year that arsonists lit the church on fire.

³⁵⁹ Dew House museum exhibit, June 2015.

³⁶⁰ For the expanded historical narrative, I delved deeper into the archive, fleshing out the churches history by researching the African Americans who lived on or near the property near the time of the churches founding according to the 1870 census. I looked for traces of lineage and origin across the oral histories I collected and census records of 1870-1930. I dug through county school teacher salary reports, I visited old family homesteads and looked through photo albums. I examined maps of antiquity and combed through the church and public school records. I cross referenced these morsels with the county tax rolls and voter registration lists, and looked for references to county happenings in local newspapers.

³⁶¹ <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hnd16>

³⁶² The school year is cataloged as 10 months: Sep 1880- Jul 1881.

³⁶³ 1881 school report IM_2484, image taken March 14, 2014.

³⁶⁴ Census record 1880, Fort Bend. This further supports the claim that the woods ancestors emigrated to Texas with Thomas Waters Dewalt sometime after 1845, and that at the least Greene Woods and his wife were the slaves willed to Thomas by his father.

³⁶⁵ Teacher listed as M Smirley and paid 50.00 each month of employment in 1898.

³⁶⁶ Teacher listed as S.J. Blanchette and paid 45.00 each month of employment in 1898.

³⁶⁷ Teacher listed as William Dickerson and paid 45.00 each month of employment in 1898.

³⁶⁸ Teacher listed as James Green and paid 45.00 each month of employment in 1898,

³⁶⁹ See image of Dew and Hutchins coin, valued at \$1.00.

³⁷⁰ Perhaps my ability to speak at the Juneteenth celebration stemmed from my outsider status. More than likely, it was because this particular event was geared towards a youthful audience, and a strategically placed young person speaking on local history preservation would be received more readily from a younger activist.

³⁷¹ NIV, Nahum 3:14..

³⁷² Pruitt, *The Other Great Migration*, 111.

³⁷³ <http://www.chron.com/local/gray-matters/article/The-past-and-future-of-I-45-6244256.php>

³⁷⁴ Within the district are several state designated historic markers for historic sites. The brinks are part of the historic *district* but do not have a specific site designation.

³⁷⁵ This continues to be a point of contention for the Gregory school, as they have been denied historic designation despite submitting multiple applications.

³⁷⁶ <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/constitutions/texas1866/a8>

³⁷⁷ <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/constitutions/texas1866/a3>

³⁷⁸ Pruitt, *The Other Great Migration* 67.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ The application alludes to the scholarship of Henry Glassie in identifying the vernacular landscapes of marginalized communities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The shotgun house was common in low income areas because of its simple floorplan and relatively cheap building materials.

³⁸¹ Nomination form, section 8, page 7.

³⁸² Mary Corbin Sies, "Toward a Performance Theory of the Suburban Ideal, 1877-1917." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 4 (1991): 197.

³⁸³ Ibid., 198.

³⁸⁴ Generally, absentee landlords were the norm for Freedmen Town residents until land developers began to entice them to sell. There is little evidence that absentee landowners in Freedmen's Town reinvested into the community. Rather, they sat on the property until the price was right to sell.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 7:1.

³⁸⁷ Pruitt notes many came because of job opportunities while others fled Galveston because hurricane of 1900.

³⁸⁸ Today it still serves as a community public space for festivities and demonstrations.

³⁸⁹ Pruitt states that middle and upper class elite social clubs arose in Freedmen's Town.

³⁹⁰ Like Lakeland, Freedmen's Town remained unpaved and did not have access to city services for years during Jim Crow, despite paying taxes to the county and the city.

³⁹¹ Nomination Form Freedmen's Town, January 1984 7:7.

³⁹² Many African American businesses flourished within the community because there was a built in clientele. Freedmen's Town was, from its onset, a self-sustaining community that provided its citizens access to resources inaccessible in white Houston.

³⁹³ According to the church website the church utilized space in the basement of First Baptist Church in Houston prior to building their own sanctuary.

³⁹⁴ <http://www.ambchouston.org/index.php/about-church-building>

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/national-register-historic-places/national-register-criteria>

³⁹⁷ A copy of the National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination form is included in the Freedmen's Town special collections at the Houston Metropolitan Resource Center.

³⁹⁸ Nomination Form: Freedmen's Town 8.

³⁹⁹ A similar strategy of significance through association was used by the St. John Fundraising and Preservation Committee in their second application attempt. Also, note the original moniker of the community—Freemans Town.

⁴⁰⁰ Nomination Form: Freedmen's Town 8:1.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid., section 7.

⁴⁰³ Historical application for national Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination form, section 8

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., section 8, page 11.

⁴⁰⁵ National Register for Historic Places application, section 7 page 1.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., section 7 page 3.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. section 7, page 4.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., section 7, page 5.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., section 7 page 7.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., section 8, page 1.

⁴¹² Ibid, 8. 6

⁴¹³ Ibid, section 7, page 2

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., section 7, page 5.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., section 7, page 6.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., section 7, page 6.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., section 8 pages 1 and 2.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 8.3

⁴²⁰⁴²⁰ Ibid, 8.8.

⁴²¹ Ibid., .9.

⁴²² Mary Patiillo McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,) 28.

⁴²³ Ibid., 25.

⁴²⁴ In some ways, Freedmen's Town is still very much an intraclass community. In part, this is because gentrification has brought in a new class of residents but also because there are any descendants of the original settlers that still reside in the community.

⁴²⁵ The application seeks designation of what remains of the Western part of the community and utilizes these institutional mainstays as evidence of Freedmen's Town historical significance.

⁴²⁶ Each has been restored and outfitted with artifacts from the period of their construction. Docents give daily tours of the structures to patrons. The steady clamor of new construction and interstate traffic punctuates the experience.

⁴²⁷ Freedmen's Town nomination form section 7, January 1984.

⁴²⁸ Catherine Roberts, Personal email, August 11, 2015.

⁴²⁹ RBHY Museum flier.

⁴³⁰ An additional opportunity was created in conjunction Prairie View A & M to of create the Preservation Architecture Internship Program

⁴³¹ McDavid, Carol (2006) "The Power of a Name: Reclaiming Heritage in Freedmen's Town, Houston, Texas," African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 52, page 2.

⁴³² McDavid et al.—Urban Archeology and the Pressures of Gentrification 40.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Catherine Roberts, Oral History Interview, September 28, 2015.

⁴³⁵ Rutherford B.H. Yates informational video, <http://www.rbhy.org/>

⁴³⁶ Oral history interview, Doris Ellis, September 28, 2015.

⁴³⁷ May 2, 2015 court hearing transcript.

⁴³⁸ March 2 court transcript, page 10.

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 12

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴³ The irony of course in all of this is that the new white residents are complaining about the very thing that Freedmen's Town, as a marginalized community, experienced for years. Multiple petitions by FTA shed light on the deplorable condition of the roads and the lack of consistency with city services. Nevertheless, it wasn't until white residents move in and formed their own New Fourth Ward Residents Association that the city took notice and decided to act.

⁴⁴⁴ After the first injunction filed by FTPC against the city and Conrad construction, the city of Houston dropped the case against FTPC, but Conrad construction continued theirs. Excerpts from the March 2, 2015 injunction is included in this section.

⁴⁴⁵ The "I voted yes to destroy history" flier went viral in summer 2015, strategically running alongside the council debates and mayoral election.

⁴⁴⁶ A February 15, 2015 news story from ABC 13 highlights a similar grassroots preservation project going on in the First Ward. One activist notes, "'I think Houston has done a really bad job of preserving its

neighborhoods for the most part.” <http://abc13.com/society/new-preservation-project-underway-in-first-ward/519276/>

⁴⁴⁷ Conrad construction is the most recent contractor to become involved with the project. A 2014 article published in the Houston Chronicle states, “In 2007, former Mayor Bill White and U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee agreed to tunnel under the bricks to do the pipe renovations.” The updated plan in 2014 claimed the renovation would be twice as expensive should they utilized trenchless technology. FTPC is demanding that the city honor the original plan supporting tunneling under the bricks.
(<http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Fourth-Ward-residents-pray-for-bricks-history-to-5771327.php>)

⁴⁴⁸ March 2, 2015 court transcript, page 23.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 36

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 65

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁵⁴ Doris Ellis, oral history interview, September 28, 2015.

⁴⁵⁵ I have edited out the pauses, ums, uhs, and drawn out syllables of this oral history.

⁴⁵⁶ Doris Ellis, oral history interview, September 28, 2015.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ The preservation efforts in Freedmen’s Town by other women spans a longer period of time—Mccaluagh has the grand founder of the RBHY museum and can trace her lineage to the community’s founder. While her activism is noteworthy and warrants a fuller analysis, my discussion solely focuses on efforts since the 1984 National Register of Historic Places nomination.

⁴⁵⁹ Oral History Interview with Gladys House, January 21, 1994.

<http://digital.utsa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15125coll4/id/1628>

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ <http://forwardtimesonline.com/2013/index.php/state-local/item/2256-the-attack-on-our-sacred-streets-continues-does-the-city-of-houston-owe-descendants-of-freedmen%E2%80%99s-town-%E2%80%99reparations%E2%80%9D-for-land-and-bricks-purchased-by-freed-slaves>

⁴⁶² Doris Ellis, Oral History Interview, September 28, 2015.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ I have also self-reflexively analyzed my role in the process of meaning making, being careful not to impose my own research agenda onto the groups of study.

⁴⁶⁸ Laura Pheifer, “The Planner’s Guide to Tactical Urbanism” (MUP Thesis, 2013, McGill School of Urban Planning, 2013).

⁴⁶⁹ The Texas Historical commission requires the county historical marker chair to sign off on the application at the county level before it moves to state level for consideration.

⁴⁷⁰ This was achieved, to varying degrees of success, through establishing significance arguments to include in public history narratives and through creating a website or generating social media presence.

⁴⁷¹ Efforts included designing and selling T-shirts in the community, establishing a heritage weekend or founder’s day celebration, sending an open letter to surrounding communities, schools, and churches, initiating monthly preservation activities to help maintain volunteers, requesting supplies and donations from local businesses, and starting a crowd sourcing or go fund me account to raise money for special projects.

⁴⁷² These included two year colleges, four year public institutions, private universities, museums, nonprofit preservation organizations in the area, local historical commissioners and civil servants. Resources were not always monetary; social and political capital went a long way in helping the organizations garner support in the public sphere.

⁴⁷³ Whether it be through the county, city, state, or the National Trust, designation, historic designation was part of every preservation agenda of the organizations of study.

⁴⁷⁴ We utilized the free one month trial for ancestry.com for the workshop, and should a community organization wish to do monthly workshops getting a 99.00 membership would be the best course of action. Alternatively, many public libraries offer the service for free, and event space can be requested free of cost or at a nominal fee.

⁴⁷⁵ LCHP is very resourceful with their funding for these community events. The profits from the amusement park will pay for catering for the Beach Day.

⁴⁷⁶ I return to hands in the "Chit'lins" here, and am reminded of my own classism in visiting St. John during these first few months. Nelson reminds us that we must humbling seek truth through our scholarship, even if it means addressing our own -isms in the process.

⁴⁷⁷ Letter to the community, St. John Baptist Church, 2013.

⁴⁷⁸ According to the oral History testimony of Pastor David Fisher at one point, a \$300.00 money order was found taped to the door of the church early one Sunday morning

⁴⁷⁹ In each community of study arson has occurred and most suspects are never apprehended. Whether it be the arson in Lakeland as white fled their homes, the church fire in 2006 at St. John, or the fires that devastated portions of Freedmen's Town during the early 2000s. These cases go underreported and thinly investigated. More research is required to address the ways in which community members and historic preservationists in the community address preservation at sites of violence and trauma.

⁴⁸⁰ In chapter three, I detailed the network of black Baptist churches across the state of Texas during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁴⁸¹ Many of these churches have since been lost to low membership, demolition, or arson.

⁴⁸² A third and lesser known organization is the Missionary Baptist Association of Texas which also boast of member churches across the state.

⁴⁸³ This year their conference is at the end of October in Temple, TX. I am considering attending on behalf of St. John.

⁴⁸⁴ <http://www.fortbendstar.com/letters-to-the-editor-2/>

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ In addition to the T-shirt sales and various smaller scale fundraising endeavors, the match the gift program brought thousands of dollars to the preservation initiatives in Freedmen's Town.

⁴⁸⁷ Local preservation grants are extremely competitive, usually underfunded and promote a particular narrative of Texas history that continues to marginalize African American experiences.

⁴⁸⁸ As discussed in chapter four, Ben Hall was in the early stages of his mayoral campaign when he took the case or FTPC.

⁴⁸⁹ Hayden, *Power of Place*, 246.

⁴⁹⁰ The exception of course in Lakeland where whites actually slowly settled first and, upon the arrival of African American residents, fled to whiter areas. In Dewalt where St. John was originally located, whites owned the land and a few lived in the area, but overall the community was African American.

⁴⁹¹ <http://digital.utsa.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15125coll4/id/1628>

⁴⁹² HACH 1997 HOPE VI Application, 1.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Even today heated debate ensues about what the city did with the federal funds they were granted for the project.

⁴⁹⁶ HACH/HOPE IV Application.

⁴⁹⁷ Doris Ellis, Oral History Interview. September 28, 2015.

⁴⁹⁸ Audre Lorde. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110- 114. 2007. Print.

⁴⁹⁹ Doris Ellis, oral history interview, September 28, 2015.

⁵⁰⁰ Deacon Walker, Personal Quote.