



Honoring the Story of Black America

“Let us mark space and culture with forms that represent the best in the human experience to remind us all of the full contributions of Black America.”

Brent Leggs

Executive Director, African American Cultural Heritage Fund,
National Trust for Historic Preservation;
Member, Black History & Culture Advisory Council,
Trust for Public Land

Historical Context

Trust for Public Land has a long and notable history of working with communities to preserve sites that represent Black history and culture. Our work recognizes the struggle and resilience of Black Americans—including sites that honor enslaved people who risked all for their freedom, Buffalo soldiers who fought for the future of America, families and neighbors who forged sanctuaries of Black joy and safety, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s childhood neighborhood. In partnership with Black communities nationwide, we continue to create, protect, and steward these places of national, historic, and cultural significance.

Black Americans have been at the core of American social and economic life since our founding. And yet, Black families, businesses, and communities across the country have been systemically deprived of land ownership and access to public spaces through numerous methods—from the failed Reconstruction promise of “40 acres and a mule,” to “Jim Crow” legalized racial segregation, to the post-World War II redlining practices that continue to impact Black communities across the country to this day.

These injustices are reflected in historic preservation, too. Of the nearly 100,000 places included in the National Register of Historic Places, only two percent reflect the experience of Black Americans. This collective oversight deprives us of a full understanding of the story of America, and going forward, presents the grave risk that many important places will be lost to privatization, development, or neglect. TPL is committed to correcting this failure.

Protecting Community Legacy

In spite of these challenges, time and again, Black communities across America have risen up to mark the map of history. We see it in places like Fort Mose, where formerly enslaved African Americans claimed the right to live free, long before the Emancipation Proclamation. We see it in Boston’s African American Meeting House where Black communities fought for abolition and desegregation to bring sweeping change to the nation. These sites celebrate the resilience, power, and vision of the Black American communities that helped build this country and continue to contribute indelibly to its future.

For almost 50 years, TPL has worked hand-in-hand with Black communities to protect and steward places that represent Black history and culture. Our focus on community engagement is unique in the parks, conservation, and preservation movements, which is why so many diverse communities entrust us to protect their cherished spaces. Combining national resources with grassroots partners, together we identify, design, build, and activate public spaces that honor the past, galvanize the present, and realize each community’s vision for the future.



Leola Montgomery (center), widow of Rev. Oliver Brown, lead plaintiff in the 1954 landmark civil rights case *Brown v. Board of Education*, stands with her daughters Linda Brown (left) and Cheryl Brown Henderson (right) in front of the Monroe School at *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas. Photo by Phil Schermeister.

Our Commitment to Justice

TPL stands for the celebration and recognition of Black lives—past, present, and future—and we are dedicated to telling a more complete American story through the preservation of Black history and culture. By protecting these historic spaces and engaging communities, we are building equitable access to outdoor spaces that embody each community's values, aspirations, and histories. And we are redoubling our efforts to defend Black history and build a more just, equitable, and inclusive future.

Every community is unique, and we customize every project to ensure that the power of public land is with the people. We combine deep community engagement with peer-reviewed research and data-driven mapping technology to pinpoint high-priority, culturally-significant sites where public land and historic preservation can have a transformative impact.



54th Massachusetts Regiment Reenactors at the dedication ceremony for Lt. Stephen Swails, the first African American soldier promoted to commissioned rank, who fought on Morris Island during the siege of Charleston in 1864, at Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston, South Carolina. Photo by Carlin Timmons.



The Bombardment of Fort Sumter in April, 1861 by Albert Bierstadt, circa 1863. The Battle of Fort Sumter in April 1861 on Morris Island started the American Civil War. Photo from TPL Archives.



King family matriarch Christine King Farris and National Park Service Superintendent Judy Forte join TPL to celebrate the dedication of Dr. King's childhood home at Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia. Photo by Kim Link.

Equitable, community-centered historic preservation is rarely simple or easy – it requires dedicated time and resources to build trust, participation, advocacy, and a collaborative vision. That is why TPL is and has always been committed to protecting Black historic and cultural sites as a permanent fixture of our work – to ensure that these special places and their stories continue to inspire for generations to come.

With the support of partners like you, we now seek to **triple our current number of Black historic and cultural preservation projects** and increase our engagement efforts to build relationships with new communities across the country. To sustain and expand our commitment, we will provide **direct funding to the often Black-led organizations leading these efforts on the ground**, and make dramatic investments in our capacity to support their vision. This immediate and long-term strategy allows us to move quickly to protect the most vulnerable sites and build equitable community partnerships to continue this necessary work in perpetuity.

Our commitment also includes creating an endowment to permanently fund a national director for Black History and Culture work. With the guidance of our expert Advisory Council, we will recruit a distinguished leader in Black historic and cultural preservation to guide our expansion of these efforts; build upon existing community partnerships to create new opportunities; and elevate the national dialogue about the critical need to **protect Black history now**.



Troopers of The New Buffalo Soldiers demonstrate cavalry maneuvers at the American West Heritage Center, Utah. Photo by Scott T. Smith.



Siblings explore the fields where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worked the tobacco farms of Meadowood, Connecticut. Photo by Kesha Lambert.

Our Legacy of Partnership

Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Park

Since the late 1970s, we have protected more than a dozen properties around Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birth home in the historic Black neighborhood of Vine City near downtown Atlanta. Today, more than a million visitors per year tour the national historic park in his name, and we continue to partner with the Vine City community to protect and activate historic spaces.

Pullman National Monument

The Pullman Historic District in Chicago, Illinois, was built in the 19th century for predominantly Black workers to manufacture railroad cars. It was the first industrial community of its kind and was crucial in the formation of the African American labor movement. TPL worked with the National Park Service to permanently protect this historic landmark to honor the courage of labor leaders who strove for equal representation and safe working conditions for Black workers.

Well's Built Hotel

The Well's Built Hotel was one of the few hotels in segregated Orlando that welcomed African Americans. Celebrities like Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Duke Ellington frequently stayed there. TPL helped conserve the building, which is now a museum dedicated to African American history and culture.

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site

Monroe Elementary School, a historically segregated schoolhouse for Black students in Topeka, Kansas, became a flashpoint of the Civil Rights movement through its students' involvement as plaintiffs in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision that outlawed legalized racial segregation. When Linda Brown, who attended Monroe, and her family fought for her right to attend the nearby Sumner Elementary School, a segregated school, they changed American history forever.

Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument

Charles Young, born into slavery, became the first African American Colonel in the United States Army and led the Buffalo Soldiers, the United States' first Black cavalry. He was also appointed the first Black superintendent of the National Park Service. We helped to permanently protect the Charles Young House with the National Park Service.

Fort Mose Historic State Park

In the 1700s, many African Americans escaped slavery to the then-Spanish colony of Florida. TPL helped conserve land for Fort Mose Historic State Park, site of the first free Black settlement in what would later become the United States of America.

African American Meeting House

Once a key gathering place for giants of the abolitionist movement, Boston's African American Meeting House is now the oldest remaining Black church structure in the United States and home to the Museum of African American History—Boston and Nantucket. When the museum outgrew its home, TPL helped it expand with its first Education and Technology Center.

Ebenezer Creek

In Springfield, Georgia, on December 9, 1864, hundreds of formerly enslaved African Americans died trying to cross Ebenezer Creek, fleeing Confederate troops. Public outcry over the deaths led President Abraham Lincoln to issue orders to redistribute 400,000 acres of confiscated coastal property in 40-acre tracts to formerly enslaved people—the infamously broken promise of “40 acres and a mule.” The order was revoked by President Andrew Johnson following Lincoln's death. TPL worked with the City of Springfield to protect the site of the tragedy as a historical park.

Timucuan Ecological Preserve

TPL recently helped the National Park Service protect four acres of coastal forest on Fort George Island in Florida's Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. The island was once home to a formerly enslaved African princess named Anna Kingsley, who managed a large plantation on the site in the early 1800s.

Advisory Council

Black History & Culture Advisory Council members are esteemed leaders and experts in myriad disciplines. They share a passion for our mission and advancing our work to create, protect, and activate public spaces of historical and cultural significance to Black communities across the country. Inspired by our past accomplishments—and the opportunity to achieve so much more—they have joined in our mutual commitment to build a more equitable future and celebrate Black history and culture.



Reenactors pose in period costumes at Fort Mose Historic State Park, site of the first free Black settlement in what is now the United States and a National Historic Landmark on the Florida Black Heritage Trail, located just north of St. Augustine, Florida. Photo by Mark Grandin.

Members offer expert advice; provide historical and cultural context to our work; recommend and engage additional volunteers and partners; contribute funds; and advocate for this mission-critical work across their personal and professional networks. We are deeply grateful for their leadership, and we look forward to growing these partnerships, pushing the bounds of our intellectual curiosity and capacity, and honoring the story of Black America—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.



Neighbors and visitors alike come together to celebrate the annual Homecoming events at Nicodemus National Historic Site, the oldest and only remaining Black settlement from the period west of the Mississippi River. Photo by Angel Franco.

Investment

To serve more communities through the preservation and restoration of Black historic and cultural sites, we:

- Engage local and national partners to identify, protect, and activate meaningful public spaces
- Provide direct support to local partner organizations to strengthen the fabric of the entire community
- Utilize peer-reviewed research, big data, and cutting edge global information systems and mapping technology to pinpoint high-priority, historic, and culturally significant lands
- Recruited a national program director and will establish a permanent endowment for this role
- Established a cross-sectoral advisory council to advise our nationwide program

In the coming years, we will raise a total of \$20 million to sustain these efforts for future generations. We have already secured over \$1.6 million toward our goal, and we need your advocacy and support to continue this work with the urgency and dedication it requires. Our funding priorities balance both the immediate needs of our community partners and our shared vision to advance the preservation of Black history and culture forever:

- \$14 million to complete 10 active projects and launch more than 20 projects in development across the country
- \$3 million to permanently endow a national program directorship to lead these efforts in perpetuity
- \$2 million to expand the project pipeline and build program capacity for nationwide research and advocacy
- \$1 million to provide direct funding and hands-on training for Black-led partner organizations

The Time Is Now

From the Sweet Auburn neighborhood in Atlanta where Martin Luther King, Jr. grew up, to America's first free Black settlement at Fort Mose, to the Well's Built Hotel, to the Monroe Elementary School in Topeka, TPL is dedicated to protecting, honoring, and celebrating places that help to tell the history of Black people in America.

Your support is key to realizing this goal.

If not now, then when?



A couple enjoys the sunset at Glendale Park, once a battleground of segregation, now a vibrant neighborhood gathering place in Oak Cliff, Texas. Photo by Jason Flowers.



A family reads educational signage in front of Dr. King's childhood home at Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in the Vine City neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. Photo by Kim Link.



Sen. Cory Booker helps students break ground on the park they helped design, Nat Turner Memorial Park, serving over 19,000 people in Newark, New Jersey. Photo by Seth Sherman.



A family explores the farm in Connecticut where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worked during the summers when he first "felt an inescapable urge to serve society." Photo by Kesha Lambert.



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