Historic Black Towns and Settlements

Tuskegee, Macon County, Alabama
Grambling, Lincoln Parish, Louisiana
Hobson City, Calhoun County, Alabama
Eatonville, Orange County, Florida
Mound Bayou, Bolivar County, Mississippi

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Vision Statement
The vision of the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance, Inc. (HBTS) is to protect and preserve for future generations the heritage, history and cultural traditions of Alliance members such that those who follow will have the ability to assume active stewardship to understand, interpret and appreciate these historic places through the lenses of their inhabitants.

Mission Statement
The mission of the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance, Inc. (HBTS) is to work collaboratively to actively preserve and promote the heritage, history and culture of these historic places by utilizing their human, environmental, built, arts, and humanities resources to nurture economic development and to support an enhanced quality of life for their residents, neighbors and fellow Americans.
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Overview

A group of America’s most representative historic Black towns and settlements, each more than one hundred years old, have formed an alliance (HBTS) to leverage historic preservation to protect their respective communities, educate their residents and the public at large, and generate economic development individually and collectively:

Tuskegee, Macon County, Alabama (Mayor Johnny Ford) - c.1833, settled; incorporated 1843; 181 years

Grambling, Lincoln Parish, Louisiana (Mayor Ed Jones) - settled c.1865; incorporated 1953; 149 years

Hobson City, Calhoun County, Alabama (Mayor Alberta McCrory) - settled c.1865; incorporated 1899 - 149 yrs

Eatonville, Orange County, Florida (Mayor Bruce Mount) - settled 1881; incorporated 1887; 125 yrs

Mound Bayou, Bolivar County, Mississippi (Mayor Darryl Johnson) - settled c.1887; incorporated 1898; 116 years

Since April 1, 2014 the mayors of each town have completed the following:

• Weekly conference calls for coordination, planning, and information updates.

• Each town is recruiting and appointing local residents to serve on respective historic preservation committees.

• Site visits to Tuskegee and Mound Bayou. The mayors will visit Hobson City for its 115 Founders Day celebration between August 14 and 17. A visit is scheduled to Grambling for Constitution Day activities to be held September 14-16, 2014.

• Five major collaborative historic preservation grants have been prepared for the HBTS since April.
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Overview, continued

The proposed initiative will simultaneously address the unique challenges of the five historic Black towns, in addition to universal issues facing all American small and rural communities under a five year alliance and collaboration:

Endangered/threatened historic resource mitigation plan development and initiation for each community, as appropriate. Universal issues of sustainability will be identified and defined for collaborative action.

Strategic plan development for implementing active formal stewardship mechanisms, as appropriate for each community (Certified Local Government /CLG, community land trust, etc.), including stewardship training youth and residents in each community.

Historic preservation “theme based” cultural tourism development, including marketing, programming, exhibit planning, and advanced interpretation and exposure of collective national historic content.

Development of model community based and interstate educational programs (primary, secondary, adult) in partnership with state humanities councils.

Collaborative educational workshop presentation, exhibit, and marketing promotion to a national in January, 2015 (at 26th Annual ZORA! Festival in Eatonville, Florida).

National advocacy (group and individual) - Organization and production of an annual national conference.
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Historical Background

More than one thousand and two hundred Black settlements, enclaves, and towns were established in the United States between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. More than five hundred settlements were established with the physical elements and cultural institutions in a town format. Only fifty to sixty Black towns were legally incorporated in nineteen states between 1865 and 1915. The separate Black towns represented radical options when they were founded in the nineteenth century. They incorporated self-government and independent enterprise into streams of African American ritual and tradition. More importantly, the incorporated Black towns allowed all who lived within their boundaries to claim their civil rights (practical application of 13th, 14th, and 15th Constitutional amendments): right to vote, right to hold public office, right to buy, hold and own land; right to move and assemble in public places; and the right to choose one’s profession.

Each town has its own unique history and legacies with Dr. Washington, Tuskegee University (Institute), and their contemporaries. For example, Tuskegee Institute graduates were sent to Eatonville, Mound Bayou and Grambling to organize and develop schools for Blacks. These, and approximately twenty other Black schools came to be identified as the “children of Tuskegee” in various publications. Tuskegee Institute records verify that Dr. Washington sent representatives to observe, evaluate, and report on the progress and needs of the Black schools in Eatonville, Hobson City, Mound Bayou and Grambling. Dr. Washington and his entourage actually visited Eatonville and Mound Bayou, where he delivered public addresses in each town.

Major historic resources exist in each community that have been formally recognized as “endangered”, or are seriously threatened. The house of Mound Bayou co-founder, Isiah T. Montgomery, has been officially identified as one of the ten most endangered historic places in Mississippi for 2013-2014. Forty five acres of the original one hundred and sixty acres of the Robert Hungerford School site in Eatonville, Florida is threatened by sale for commercial development. In the case of Hobson City, Alabama, the entire town was formally listed as endangered in 2009.
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Project Approach

An extended range of resources and contexts that were critical in the origins and evolution of historic settlement and evolution of historic Black towns and settlements will be documented.

The significance of collective achievements of town residents (contributing groups) will be highlighted as opposed to assigning primary value to heroic accomplishments by individuals.

The roles of land ownership and agriculture, including sustainable rituals, traditions and customs will complement historic architectural significance and interpretation.

The significance of vernacular landscape, cultural landscapes, and vernacular architecture in historic Black towns and settlements will be presented in detail.

The roles of historic material culture (folk art, sewing, carpentry, metal work, etc.) to definition of place will be an integral part of the project.

The project will use interdisciplinary expertise that will include American and African American cultural, social, economic, and political history; humanities and arts program planning and production; historic landscape (classical and vernacular); historic architecture (classical and vernacular); material culture, Historic American Buildings Survey (H.A.B.S.) documentation; historic resources interpretation; data management; and program management. The humanities disciplines (history, literature, religious studies, etc.) will be a major contributor.

An agreement is in place with the Tuskegee University Archives that will allow access to authentic records that verify the direct relationships between educational, agricultural, landscape, and community development legacies. A master time line and contextual kinship (physical and cultural) matrix for the communities has been created by Fly/Hunt for development through the project. Using this composite information, the required field work will begin simultaneously in each participating community. A field team will actually be based in each community and deployed from that point to gather necessary documentation. The resident groups will provide local contacts information and facilitate access to oral informants and other local resource persons.
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Project Deliverables

A. Website design and publication – Ongoing progress posts and updates
B. Community preparation
C. Field team deployment
D. Prepare master data collection formats and documents
E. Field information gathering and research
   1. Oral interviews (local and distance)
   2. Genealogy search, cross-reference, tree development
   3. Photo documentation (local)
   4. Field reconnaissance survey and verification (local)
   5. Public records research (local – library, courthouse, historic society; vital, civic, real estate)
   6. Organization and institution records research (local, state, national cross-reference; church, school fraternal, trade association, vocational organizations, labor groups)
   8. Private and rare collections research (local, state, Tuskegee Archives)
F. Master documentation and data compilation
G. Resource interpretation (local/interstate/national) – ongoing throughout research and documentation process
   1. Significance classification
   2. Threat assessments
   3. Intermediate findings summary and recommendations
H. National Register of Historic Places nomination(s) production
I. Cultural tourism program development
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Project Partners

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has designated the Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and the Humanities (Zora! Festival) as one of 25 Cultural Tourism Success Stories, and Zora! Festival has received the Regional Destination Award in the Humanities from the Cultural Olympiad. Festival attendance averages tens of thousands each year.

During Zora! Festival 2015, Eatonville and the other HBTS community delegations, will be showcased in two full days of programming dedicated to historic preservation in historic Black towns and settlements. Participants from across the United States and foreign countries will have the opportunity to learn about, and discuss, major historic resources, issues, techniques, and strategies from each of the towns. A comprehensive national scope workshop on historic Black towns has never been presented at Zora! Festival in its twenty-five year history, or anywhere in the United States.

Dr. William R. Ferris, Ph.D., Senior Associate Director, Center for the Study of the American South/The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill will deliver the keynote presentation at the 2015 Zora Neale Hurston Festival for the Arts and the Humanities in Eatonville, Florida.

Trinity University, Department of History and African American Studies (San Antonio, Texas) will work directly with government administrators and residents. Trinity history interns will work to identify, research, and interpret southern history, Black cultural history, and oral history.

Trinity University students, faculty, and staff will host, and manage production of a historic preservation youth summit to be held in San Antonio during the course of the project. The summit is envisioned as a three day event based on National Park Service guidelines. In addition to educational content, Trinity will record all activities and use its radio station for public broadcast of special programs that highlight features of the summit. The diverse cultural composition, renowned historic preservation community, and prehistory of human occupation dating at least 11,200 years will be used for the following instructional field trips and local community interactions:

a. World Heritage Site nominated (cultural criteria) San Antonio Missions, and contributing natural resources and neighboring African American landholders site, and the proximity and history of their interactions.

b. A historic 19th century farm and ranch containing prehistoric, archaeological, Native American, Republic of Texas, European immigrant, Black slave, and post-Civil War ranch resources.

c. A historic 19th century Black settlement containing archaeological, Native American, Republic of Texas, European immigrant, Black slave, Black agricultural, and extant County Rosenwald School building resources.
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Project Consultants

HBTS has formally retained a team of consultants to advise, coordinate, and facilitate the initiative:

Everett L. Fly, FASLA/NCARB

Everett Fly is a professional landscape architect and architect, and Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects. His historic preservation work is nationally recognized. He has researched and documented more than 1,200 historic Black settlements over thirty five years. President Bill Clinton appointed Mr. Fly to serve two terms on the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. He has served as a grants review panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Mr. Fly earned a Bachelor of Architecture, with honors, from the University of Texas at Austin, and a Master of Landscape Architecture from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Ellen P. Hunt, AIA, LEED AP BD +C

Ellen Pulner Hunt has been practicing architecture for more than 20 years. She is a licensed architect, licensed interior designer, and is accredited LEED AP BD +C. Mrs. Hunt has lived in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands; Mexico City, Mexico; Boston, Massachusetts; and El Paso and Dallas, Texas. She has traveled extensively in Europe, eastern Europe and Mexico. Mrs. Hunt has collaborated with Mr. Fly since 1982 on projects including, urban design, schools, historic preservation, and research on African American communities. She received her Bachelor of Architecture, with honors; and Post-professional Master of Architecture (Phi Kappa Phi) from the University of Texas at Austin. The focus of her master’s thesis was research on the influence of Le Corbusier on Czechoslovakian architects between the World Wars.

Dr. Carey Latimore, Ph.D., Historian

Dr. Latimore is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Trinity University, in San Antonio, Texas. He teaches courses on African American history, American reconstruction after the Civil War, history of the old South, and United States history. Dr. Latimore earned his doctorate in history from Emory University.

N.Y. Nathiri, Cultural Events Planner/Program Producer

Mrs. Nathiri is a native and Director of Multidisciplinary Programs for the non-profit Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, Inc. (P.E.C.). She has extensive expertise in arts, cultural and tourism programming, production, and management. Mrs. Nathiri earned a Master in Library Science from Cornell University.