




# **The National Emancipation Heritage Center** *at Wesley Chapel AME Church*

*Prepared for*  
*OST / Alameda Corridors Redevelopment Authority / TIRZ #7*

*April 25, 2023*

M2L Associates Incorporated | Texas Center for African American Living History | Evoke Studios



The Moral Arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards Justice  
*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

## A New Life for an Old Church

Wesley Chapel AME Church, its adjacent properties, and its placement at the Gateway of Emancipation Avenue and I-45 is an ideal National Emancipation Heritage Center location. The church directly represents emancipation because Richard Allen, born into slavery, purchased his freedom and later founded the first national Black church in the United States. The proposed work will infuse historical correctness into the plans for a national center that will seek to preserve and interpret African American history unique to Texas, post-Emancipation. The proposed initiative explores different scenarios to transform the chapel site and adjacent public realm into a national heritage site and corridor. The Heritage Center will complement TIRZ #7's redevelopment efforts in Third Ward that include Emancipation Avenue and Emancipation Park. This proposed project reinforces TIRZ #7's goal of providing a financing mechanism to encourage investment and stimulate commercial, industrial and residential development in the Emancipation Avenue corridor and the adjacent Greater Third Ward neighborhood.

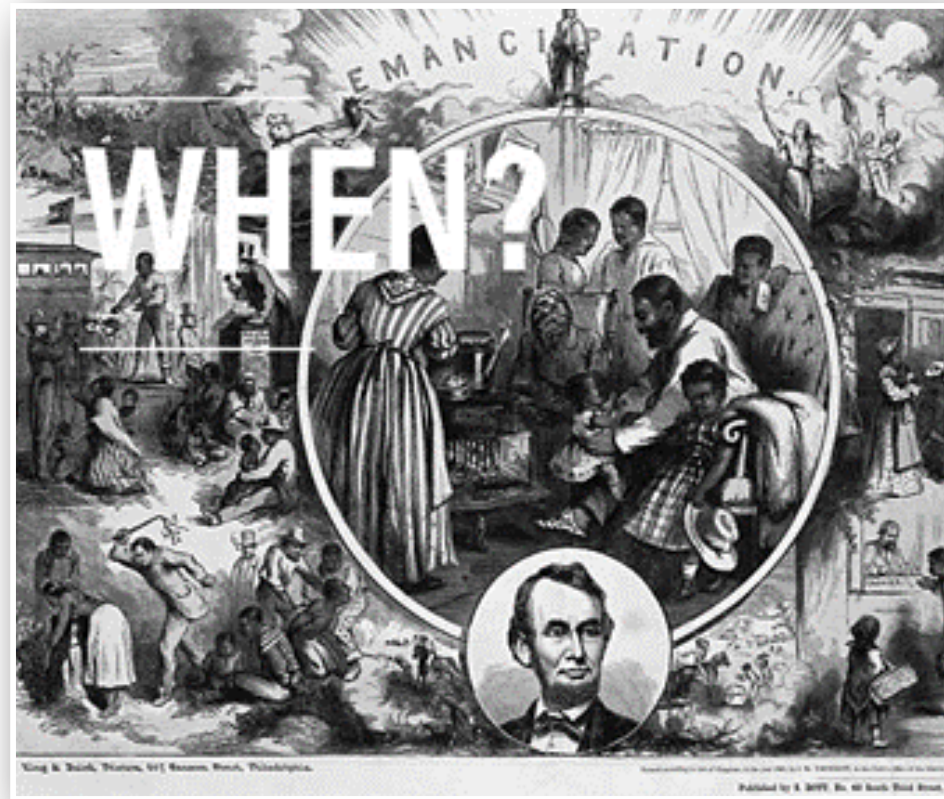
The bridge from pain to emancipation is education

*Naomi Carrier, Algenita Scott-Davis*

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**TRUE HISTORY OF EMANCIPATION**

Between the 1780s and 1930s, during the era of liberal empire and the rise of modern humanitarianism, over 80 emancipations from slavery occurred, from Pennsylvania in 1780 to Sierra Leone in 1936, says, Kris Manjapra, in his book, “Black Ghost of Empire,” There were, in fact, 20 separate emancipations in the United States alone, from 1780 to 1865, across the U.S. North and South.

Emancipation Day came to Connecticut and Rhode Island on March 1, 1784. On July 4, 1799, it dawned in New York, and on July 4, 1804, in New Jersey. After 1838, West Indian people in the United States began commemorating the British Empire’s Emancipation Day of Aug. 1.

The District of Columbia’s day came on April 16, 1862.

Eight months later, on Jan. 1, 1863, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the enslaved only in Confederate states – not in the states loyal to the Union, such as New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky and Missouri.

Emancipation Day dawned in Maryland on Nov. 1, 1864. In the following year, emancipation was granted on April 3 in Virginia, on May 8 in Mississippi, on May 20 in Florida, on May 29 in Georgia, on June 19 in Texas and on Aug. 8 in Tennessee and Kentucky.

The perils of unjust laws and racist social customs were still great in Texas for the 250,000 enslaved Black people there, but the celebrations known as Juneteenth were said to have gone on for seven straight days.

The spontaneous jubilation was partly over Gen. Gordon Granger’s General Order No. 3. It read in part, “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.”

But the emancipation that took place in Texas that day in 1865 was just the latest in a series of emancipations that had been unfolding since the 1770s, most notably the Emancipation Proclamation

signed by President Abraham Lincoln two years earlier on Jan. 1, 1863.

“In my view as a scholar of race and colonialism, Emancipation Days – Juneteenth in Texas – are not what many people think, because emancipation did not do what most of us think it did.”(Naomi Carrier, TCAALH)



\*Information as provided by TCAALH

**EMANCIPATIONS - Myths and Realities**

As historians have long documented, emancipations did not remove all the shackles that prevented Black people from obtaining full citizenship rights. Nor did emancipations prevent states from enacting their own laws that prohibited Black people from voting or living in white neighborhoods.

In fact, based on my research, emancipations were actually designed to force Blacks and the federal government to pay reparations to slave owners – not to the enslaved – thus ensuring white people maintained advantages in accruing and passing down wealth across generations.

On March 1, 1780, for instance, Pennsylvania’s state Legislature set a global precedent for how emancipations would pay reparations to slave owners and buttress the system of white property rule.

The Pennsylvania Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery stipulated “that all persons, as well negroes, and mulattos, as others, who shall be born within this State, from and after the Passing of this Act, shall not be deemed and considered as Servants for Life or Slaves.”

At the same time, the legislation prescribed “that every negroe and mulatto child born within this State” could be held in servitude “unto the age of twenty eight Years” and “liable to like correction and punishment” as enslaved people.

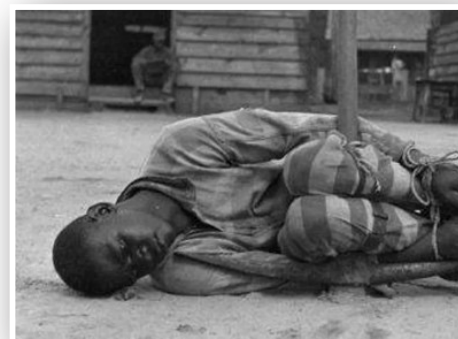
After that first Emancipation Day in Pennsylvania, enslaved people still remained in bondage for the rest of their lives, unless voluntarily freed by slave owners.

Only the newborn children of enslaved women were nominally free after Emancipation Day. Even then, these children were forced to serve as bonded

laborers from childhood until their 28th birthday.

All future emancipations shared the Pennsylvania DNA.

**SLAVERY BY ANOTHER NAME**



After the Civil War, the three Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution each contained loopholes that aided the ongoing oppression of Black communities.

The Thirteenth Amendment of 1865 allowed for the enslavement of incarcerated people through convict leasing. The Fourteenth Amendment of 1868 permitted incarcerated people to be denied the right to vote.

And the Fifteenth Amendment of 1870 failed to explicitly ban forms of voter suppression that targeted Black voters and would intensify during the coming Jim Crow era.

**In fact, Granger’s Order No. 3, on June 19, 1865 in Galveston Texas, spelled it out.**

Freeing the slaves, the order read, “involves an



absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them, become that between employer and hired labor.”

Yet, the order further states: “The freed 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 that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere”

\*Information as provided by TCAALH





**THE MEANING OF JUNETEENTH**

From the moment emancipation celebrations started on March 1, 1780, up to June 19, 1865, Black crowds gathered to seek redress for slavery. On that first Juneteenth in Texas, freed people celebrated their resilience amid the failure of emancipation to bring complete freedom.



**WESLEY CHAPEL AME CHURCH HISTORY**

Presiding Elder Rev. Henry White established the name Wesley Chapel AME Church, which was dedicated in 1877. Over the next 20 years, the congregation

moved several times and found its historic home at Emancipation Avenue and Hadley Street in 1906. After multiple years of renovation and construction, including the build-out of the second floor, it has served as a central sanctuary from 1952 until the property was sold to the City of Houston in early 2023. (Defender Network, Houston, Texas, October 2022)



**IMPORTANCE OF BLACK CHURCHES**

Symbolic of more significant societal problems, Black churches provided an environment free of oppression and racism for African Americans. Churches were the first buildings where education and fellowship happened. In the quest for social justice, the Black church is where African Americans knew they were somebody and where human rights were unquestionable. Social justice only exists in the presence of human rights. The church is where Africans received therapy for slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow segregation. Church was repaired for oppression and had all members equally.

Music was an essential part of Black Churches. This ability of the Black family to improvise their troubles into art forms very likely served as a sort of safety valve for pent-up feelings and boiling over trauma

from generation to generation. The Black Church saved the country from an even greater tragedy than that precipitated by the Civil War and himself from a disaster equally great. Hence non-violence.

The Negro has voiced the cry of the world; “O glorious solace of immense distress; a conscience and a God.” The worth of the native Negro genius to America is paramount—a wellspring of spiritual issues.<sup>1</sup>

Over twenty-six churches in Historic Third Ward are within one mile of Wesley Chapel. The Wesley Chapel has the opportunity to be a critical path forward rather than a historical footnote.

<sup>1</sup> *Religious Folk-songs of the Negro as sung by Hampton Institute*, © 1927 by The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Hampton, Virginia.

**Mother Bethal AME, Philadelphia, Founded in 1794 by Richard Allen**



**HERITAGE TOURISM DESTINATIONS**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines heritage tourism as “traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.” A high percentage of domestic and international travelers participate in cultural and/or heritage activities while traveling, and those that do stay longer, spend more, and travel more often. Heritage tourism can create jobs and business opportunities, help protect and preserve community resources, and improve the quality of life for local residents. *(Advisory Council on Historic Preservation)*



\*Information as provided by TCAALH



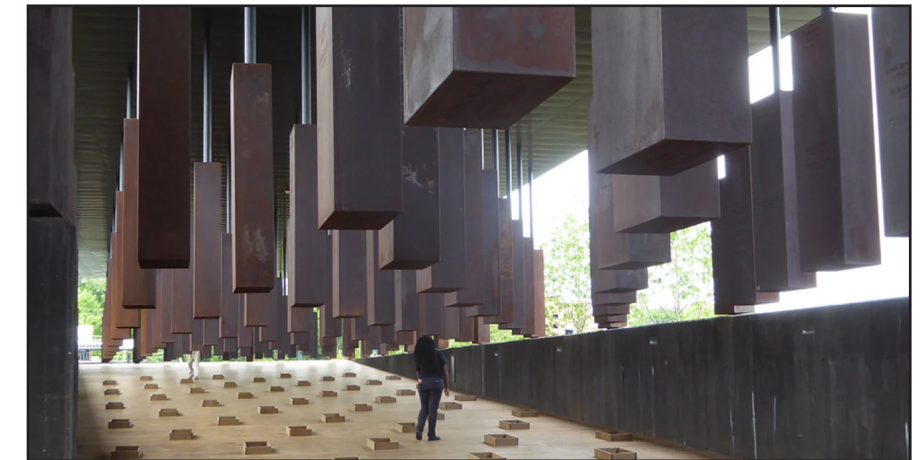
National Museum of African American History and Culture Washington, D.C



National Civil Rights Museum Memphis, TN



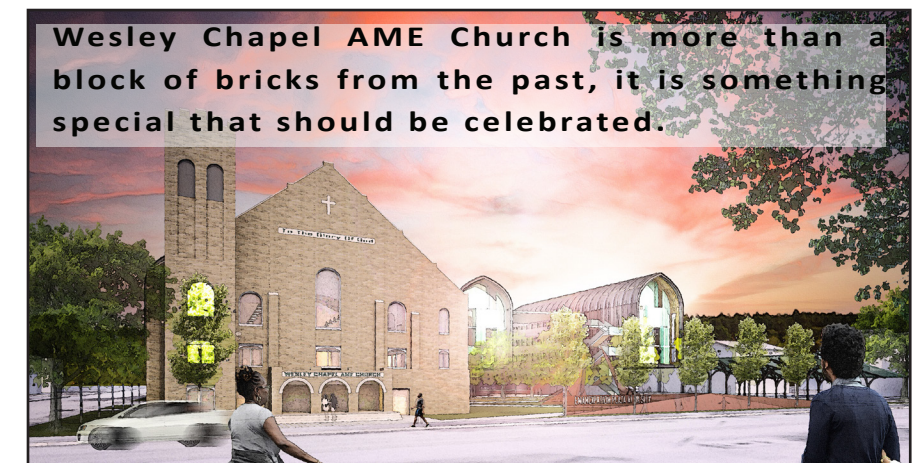
Americas Black Holocaust Museum Milwaukee, WI



National Memorial for Peace and Justice Montgomery, Alabama

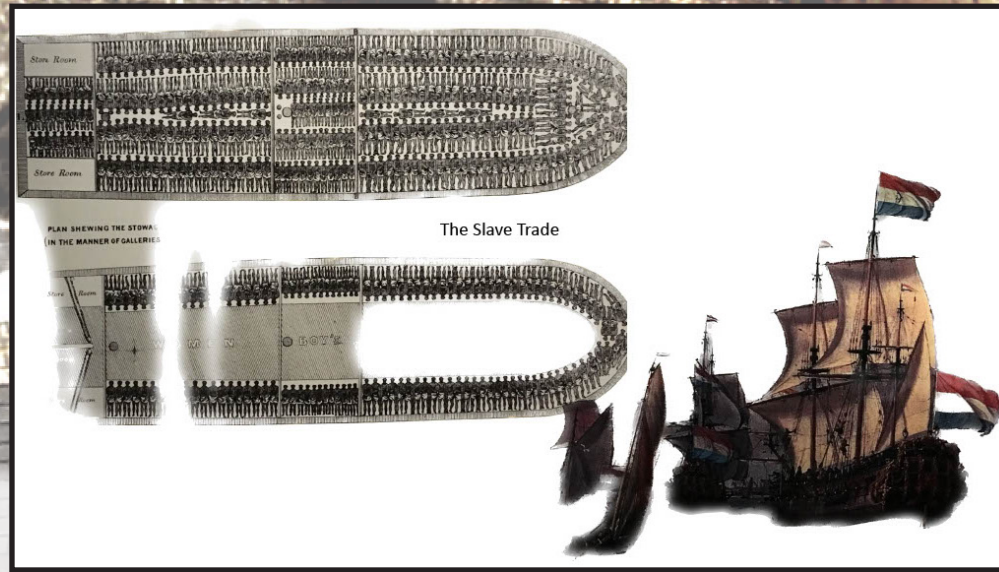


National Juneteenth Museum Fort Worth, Texas



**Wesley Chapel AME Church is more than a block of bricks from the past, it is something special that should be celebrated.**

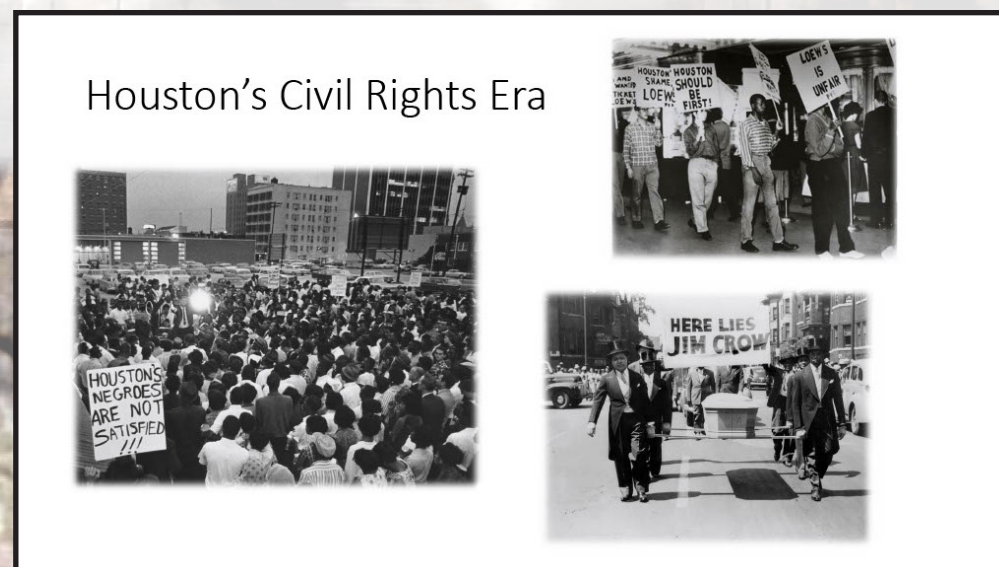
The National Emancipation Heritage Center at Wesley Chapel AME Church Houston, Texas



### THE TEXAS TIME-LINE

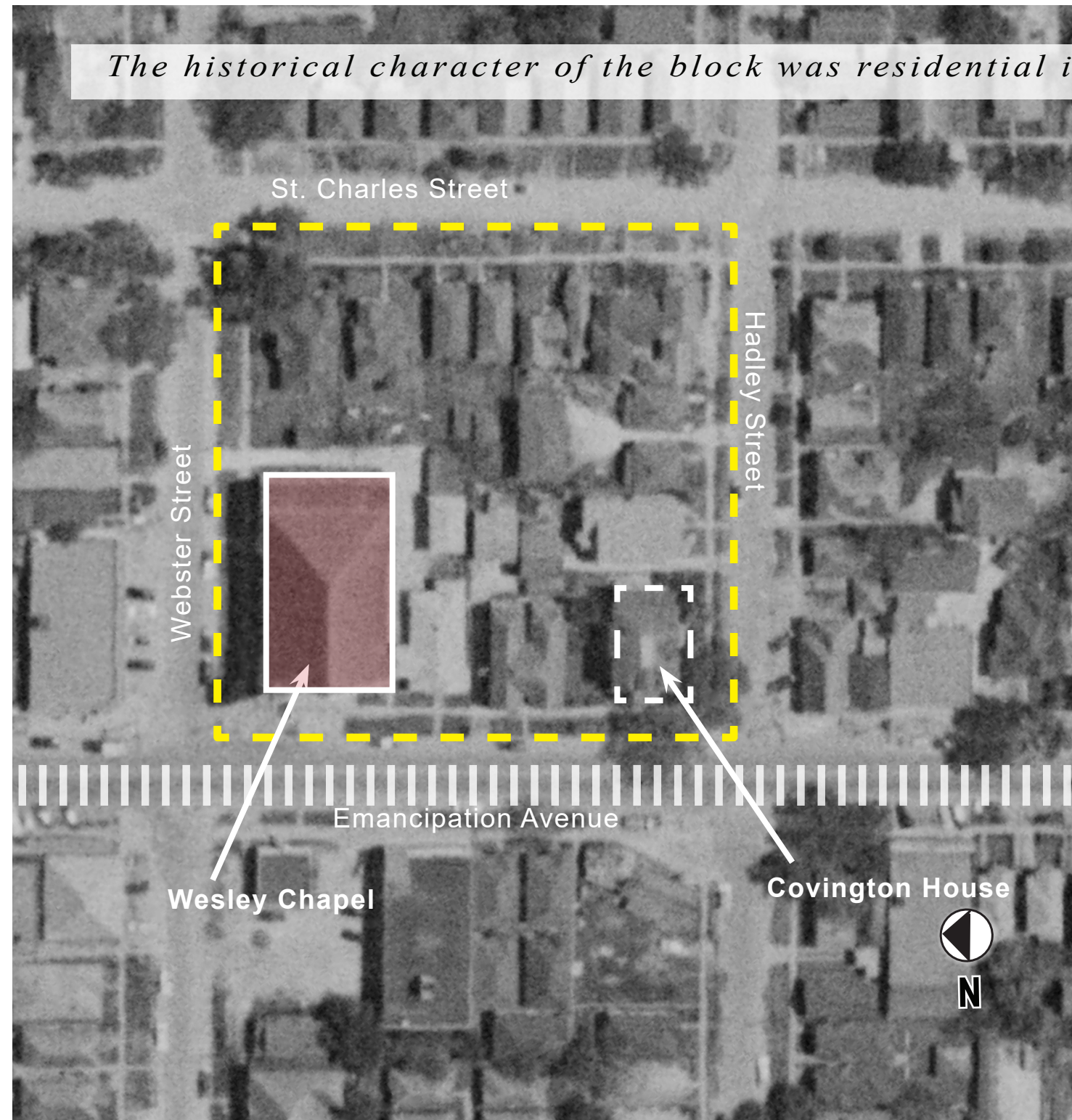
Saving Wesley Chapel AME Church is our opportunity to rebuild the legacy of Texas' freed slaves, tell their stories, and establish a "major hub for Black cultural arts" in Houston. A National Emancipation Heritage Center is a culminating experience of why "African American liberation is inevitable," and the spiritual resilience that ensures emancipation.

*Naomi Mitchell Carrier, TCAALH*

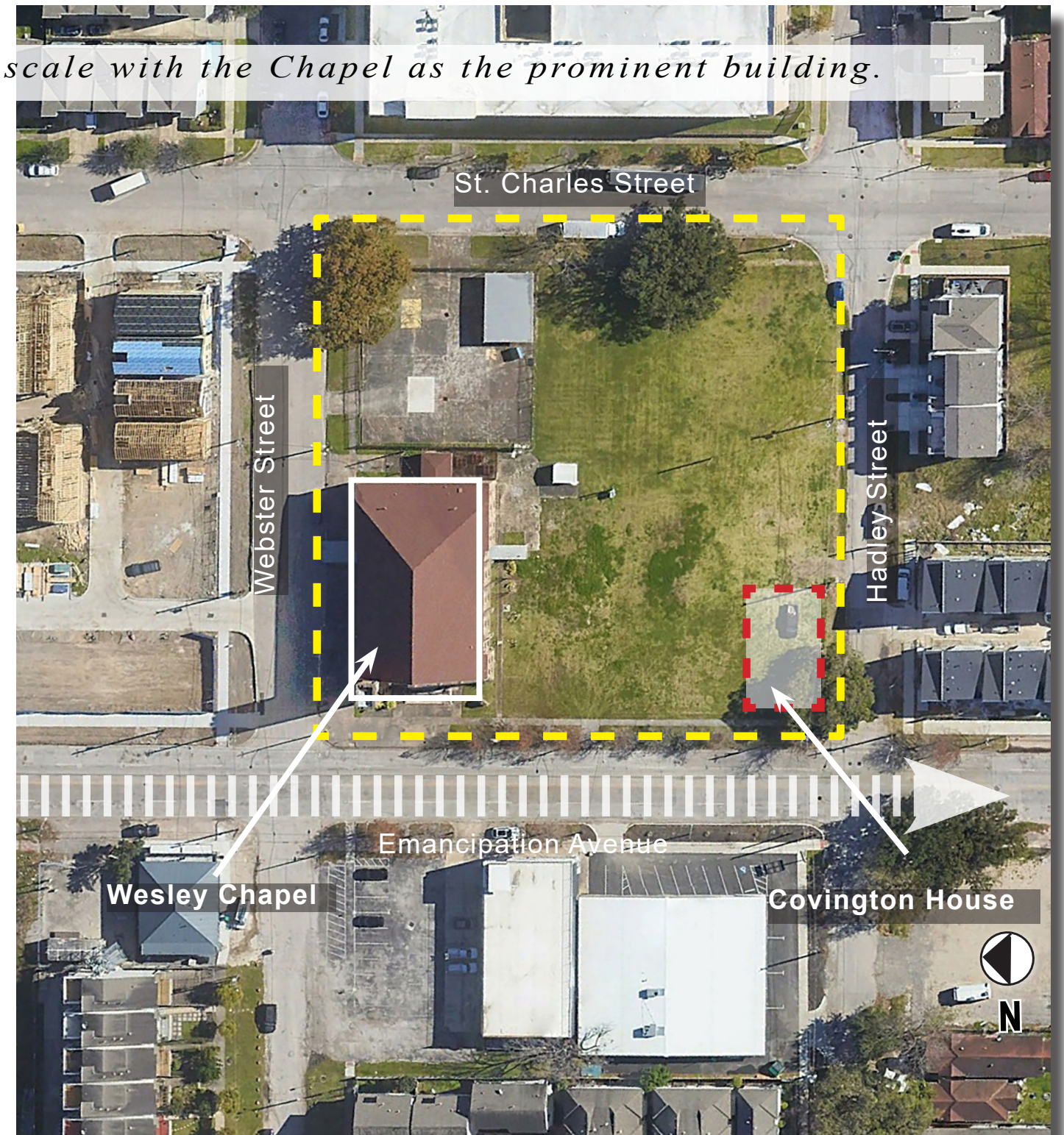




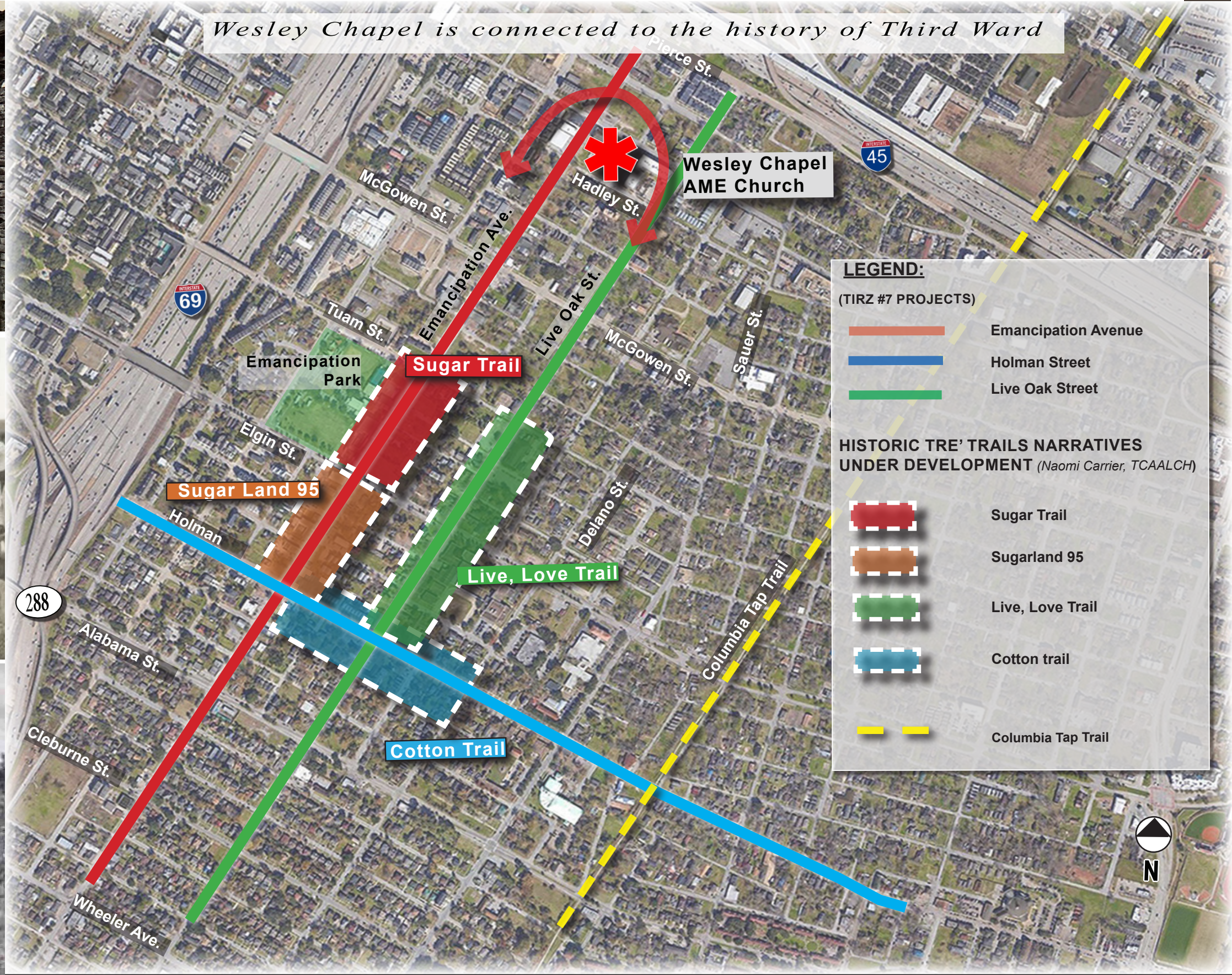
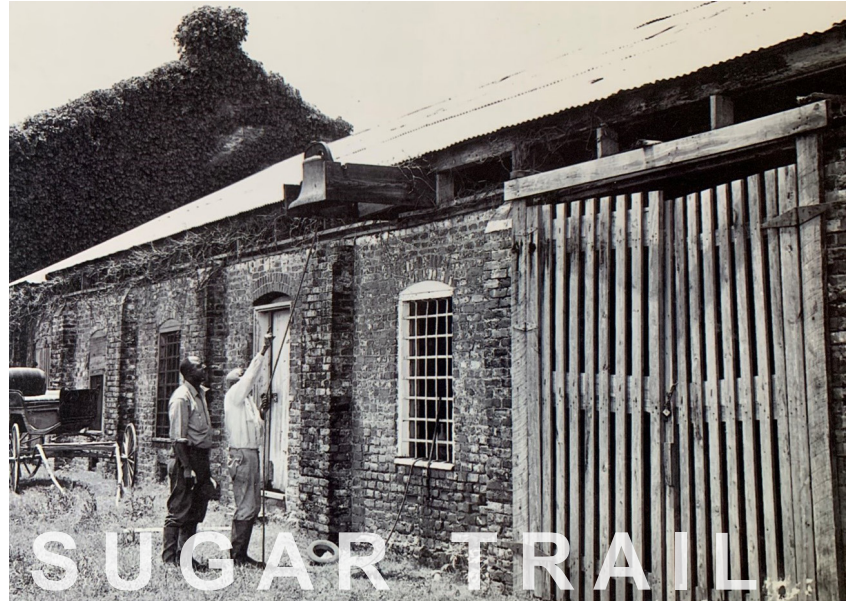
*The historical character of the block was residential in scale with the Chapel as the prominent building.*



*Aerial Photograph - 1957*



*Aerial Photograph - 2023*



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Wesley Chapel (“Chapel”)**

- \* Preserve the Chapel and create The National Emancipation Heritage Center with an emphasis on the Texas, African-American experience post Emancipation.
- \* Provide spaces for permanent and rotating cultural and historical exhibits in the church.
- \* Develop a comprehensive program for education and the arts.

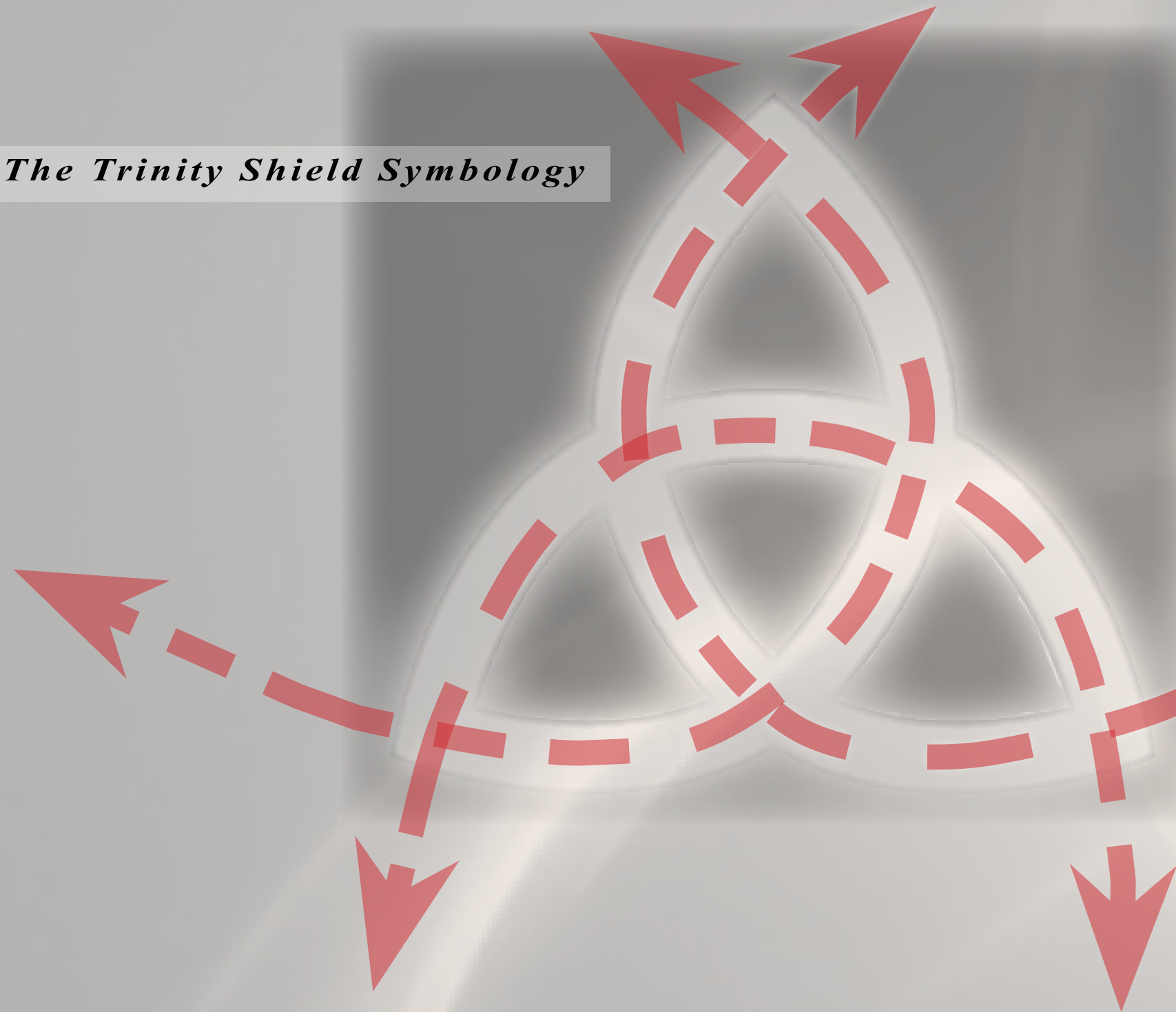
- **New Building (“Home”)**

- \* Develop a mixed-use program for a new building to contain 60-70 housing units for scholars and community support spaces (community services, grocery, parking, etc.)
- \* Respect the scale and prominence of the church along Emancipation Avenue.

- **Site (“Garden”)**

- \* Extend the church’s programming to the outdoors.
- \* Create meaningful community open spaces.
- \* Celebrate Covington House.
- \* Complement TIRZ #7’s community development initiatives.

### *The Trinity Shield Symbolology*

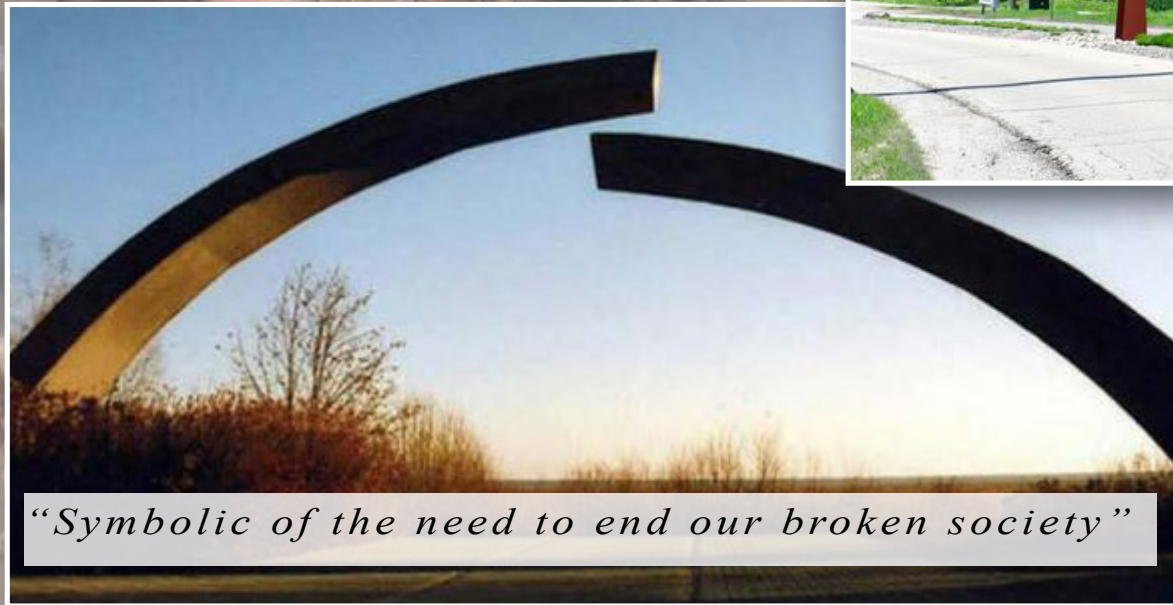


*The Trinity Shield is a traditional Christian symbology in abstract form that expresses the doctrine of the Trinity, The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as there are three distinct persons of one substance in the Trinity there are three components to the project development, the Wesley Chapel AME Church, the site, and the proposed mixed-use development. The common connection that binds these three project components is support of goal of The National Emancipation Heritage Center which can be summed up in the pursuit of EDUCATION.*

*“The Bridge from Pain to Emancipation is Education”*



*Interconnecting Arches, Gateways, and Paths*



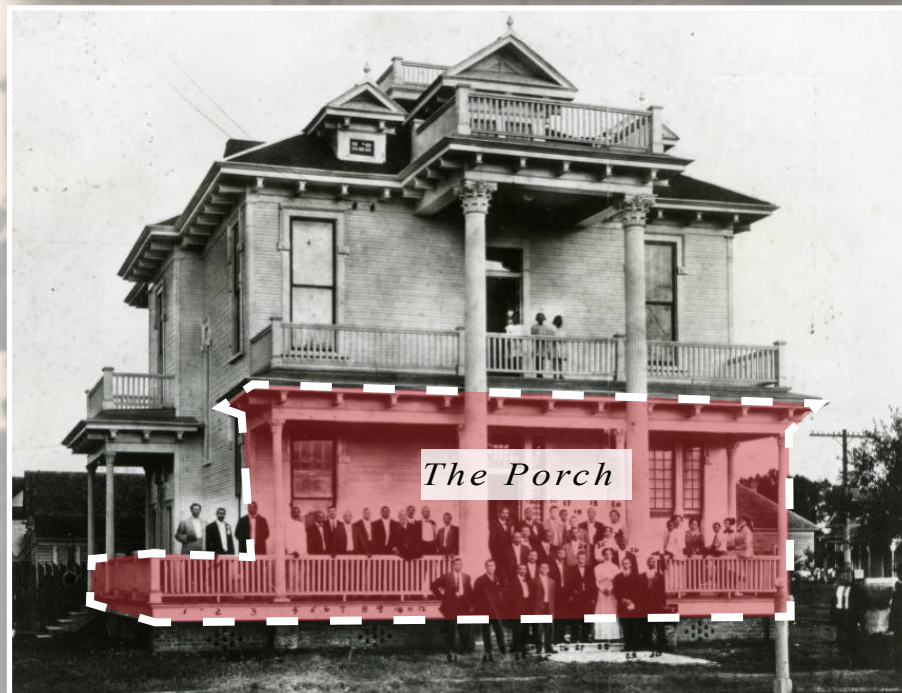
*“Symbolic of the need to end our broken society”*



*Celebrate the forms and shapes of the church*

COMMUNITY SPACE DESIGN FEATURES

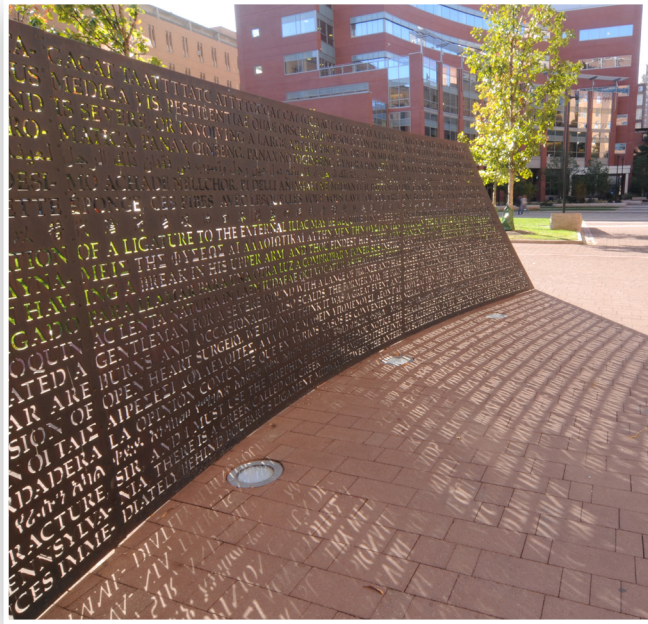
- Wesley Chapel AME Church Program Development
- Commemorate Covington House
- Immersive Experience
- Outdoor Educational Opportunities
- Typology Study - Hayti Cultural Center @ St. Joseph AME Church



*Commemorate Dr. Benjamin Jessie Covington Contributions to the Community*

*Guests included Booker T. Washington, Marian Anderson, and Roland Hayes*





Interplay of Sun and Shadow



Gateway Monuments



Light that casts on visitors

*Illuminate portraits, music, symbology, sayings throughout the center*



Building Projection



*Create an Immersive Experience That Allows Visitors to be a Part of the Story*







Allow for Interaction with Sculptural Elements



Pavement Inscriptions

- People
- Quotes
- Lyrics
- Scriptures
- Prayers



Perforated Metal Imaging



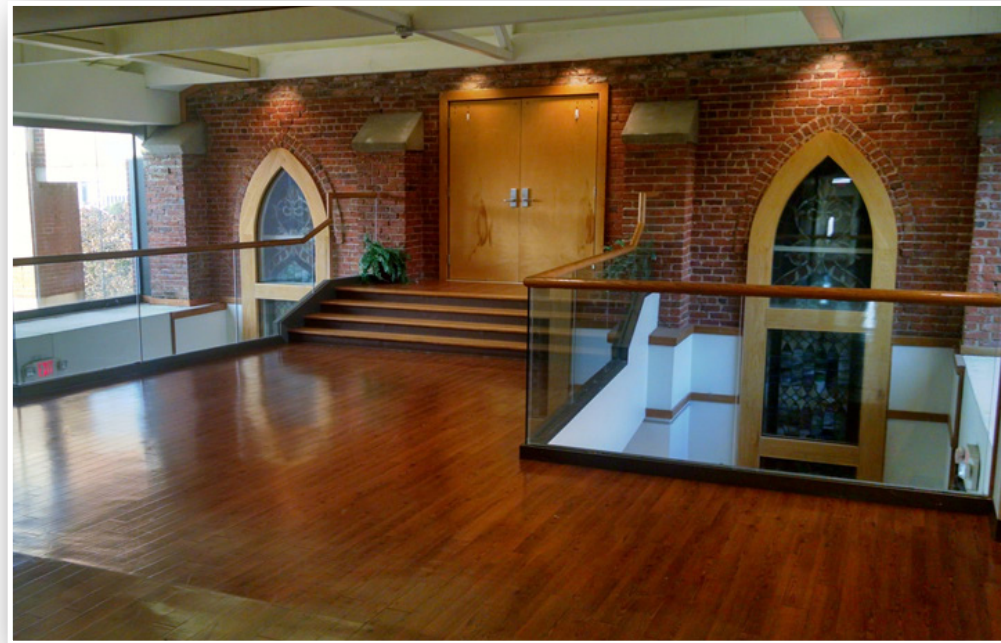
Interpretive Panels



*Create and Immersive Experience That Allows Visitors to be a Part of the Story*



*Located in Durham, North Carolina, the Hayti Heritage Center first opened to the public in 1975. Near downtown in the historic Hayti community, the center is a celebrated cultural arts and arts education institution. It is situated in St. Joseph AME Church, which was built in 1891. The mission of Hayti is “preserving and advancing the heritage and culture of historic Hayti and the African American experience through programs that benefit the broader community locally, nationally and globally.”*



### Garden

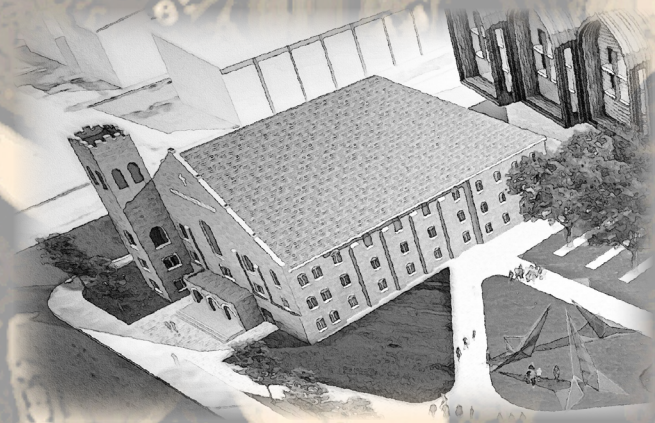
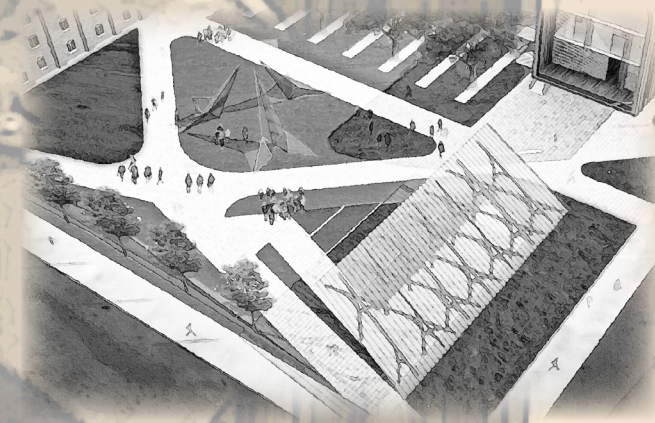
It is impossible to define the Black Church purely by the bounds of building edifices. From its earliest beginnings, the Black Church extended well beyond the walls of a sanctuary. Before acquiring the means to build church buildings—The Black Church Existed. The Black Church existed as small gatherings of people singing and praying, encouraging and helping each other through life's challenges. This evolved into meetings at Brush Arbours and "Praise Groves"—open-air spaces defined by a covering but open to the air and landscape. The approach to the outdoor spaces is to create a transparent extension of the indoor spaces into the outdoors. The central plaza is defined by an iconic, three-point sculpture that will symbolize the Trinity Shield and pathways traveled in a broken society and the march to true justice and Emancipation. Historic Covington House is commemorated with a community porch, gardens, and gathering spaces that celebrate the legacy of the Covingtons as a haven for African Americans during segregation. Pathways arc through the open space with various immersive exhibits and sculptures, allowing visitors to trace those whose footsteps paved the way.

### Chapel









Wesley Chapel AME Church celebrates the legacy of the Black Church, not purely as a sanctuary with four walls, but the Black Church as a legacy of lifting and encouraging all its people to strive for excellence. This legacy reaches beyond any building to weave communities together. Each floor of the Chapel is an opportunity to rebuild the legacy of Texas' freed slaves, tell their stories, and establish a "major hub for Black cultural arts" in Houston. A National Emancipation Heritage Center is a culminating experience of why "African American liberation is inevitable" and the spiritual resilience that ensures emancipation. The original structures of many esteemed AME Churches with grand steeples and elegant stained glass windows, constructed in the late 1890s and early 1900s through the efforts of a proud and determined African American congregation and the support of local white philanthropists, have long symbolized the dignity and resolve of a people in what was once known as the most prosperous African American communities in the United States. Eventually, these communities fell and are falling victim to "urban renewal," Loss of the church curtailed the existence of theater productions, blues, and jazz artists' renderings, practicing medical and education professionals, and entrepreneurs of every sort. The church's stately architecture was as distinct as the community for which it was built; it exemplified the spiritual nourishment of its members and their pivotal role in the civil rights movement of the era. The historic structure's role in community development must continue.

### Home

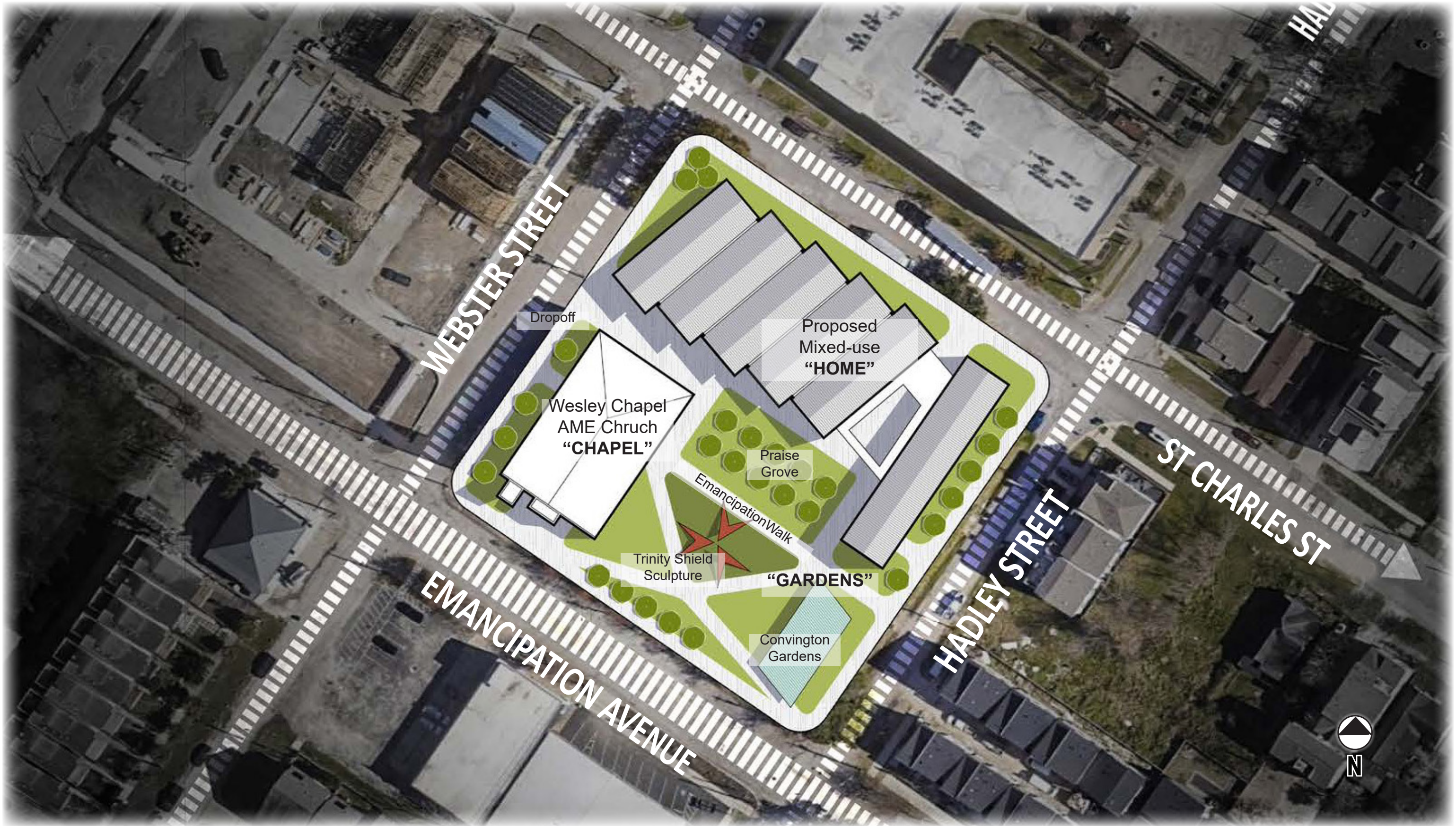
Home is at the core of any community. The plan thoughtfully weaves 60-70 homes as part of the development program. This is critical in establishing commonality and generational investment in the legacy of emancipation and will help to ensure the story of freedom is never forgotten. The proposed housing units for scholars are strategically organized to reinforce the graining and alignment of the traditional single-family home which sat on this site in previous years. The building is setback from Emancipation Avenue so as not to overshadow the Chapel. Architecturally, the building takes on an arch form that relates to the arched openings of the historic Wesley Chapel and signifies the unity and bond of freedom. To further reinforce community and place, additional programs such as a micro-grocery store and small mom & pop retail spaces are placed at the housing base, opening out to the Trinity Shield Sculpture and Covington Gardens.



**DEVELOPMENT LEGEND**

-  Educational Opportunity
-  Proposed Building
-  Cafe Patio
-  Garden Space
-  Pavilion
-  Sculptural Gateway
-  Praise Grove
-  Trinity Shield Sculpture









Emancipation Walk



Outdoor Cafe



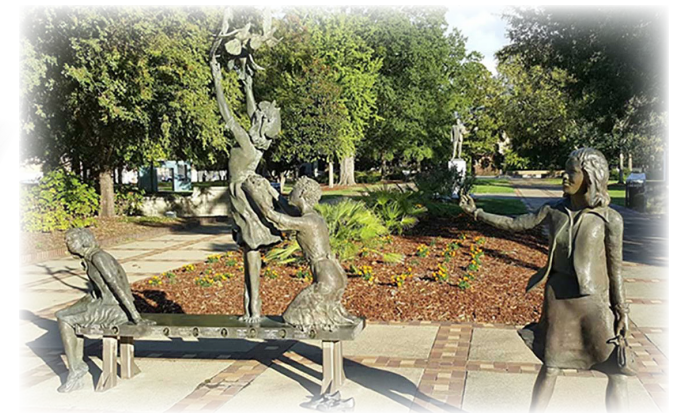
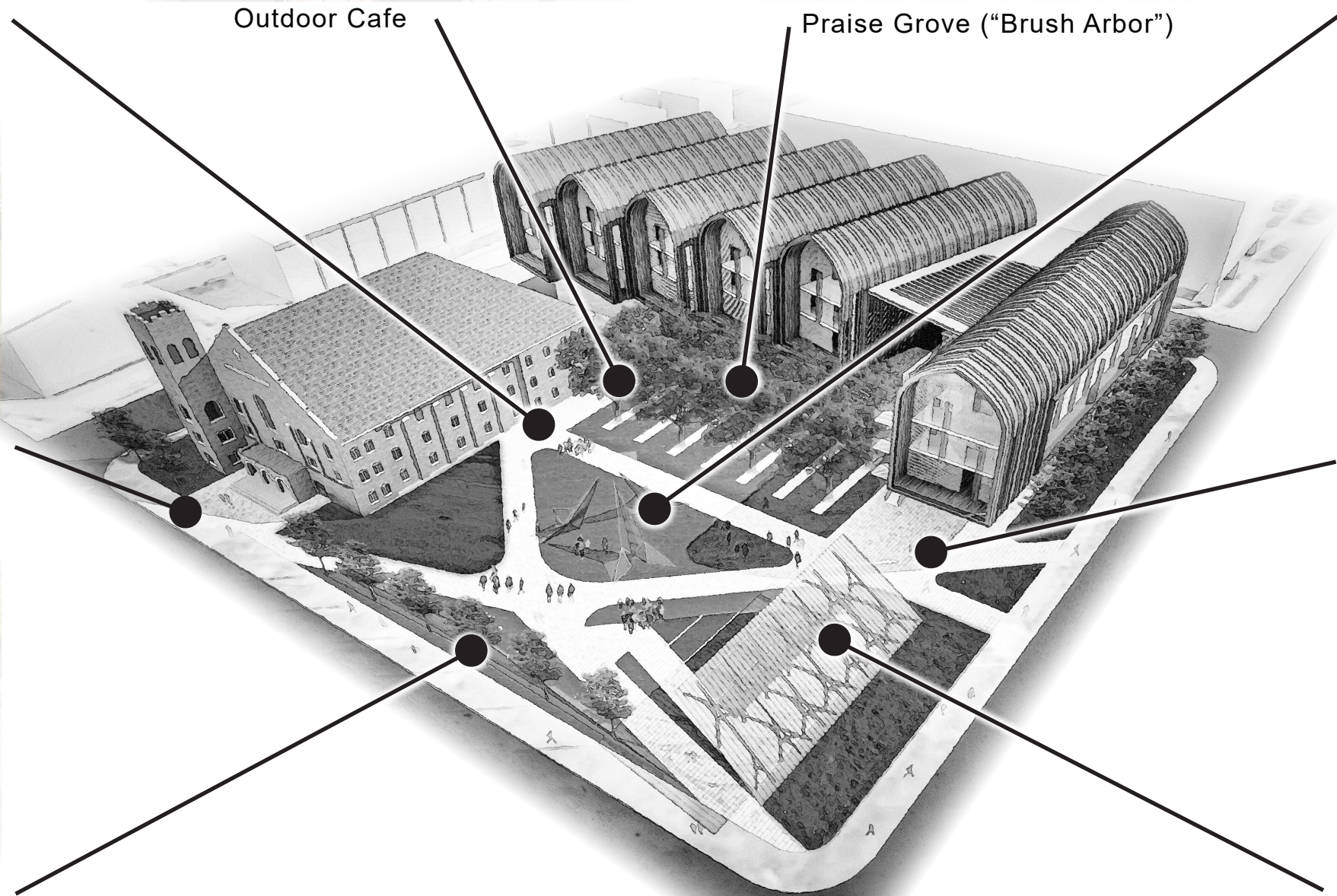
Praise Grove ("Brush Arbor")



Trinity Shield Sculpture



Sculptural Gateway



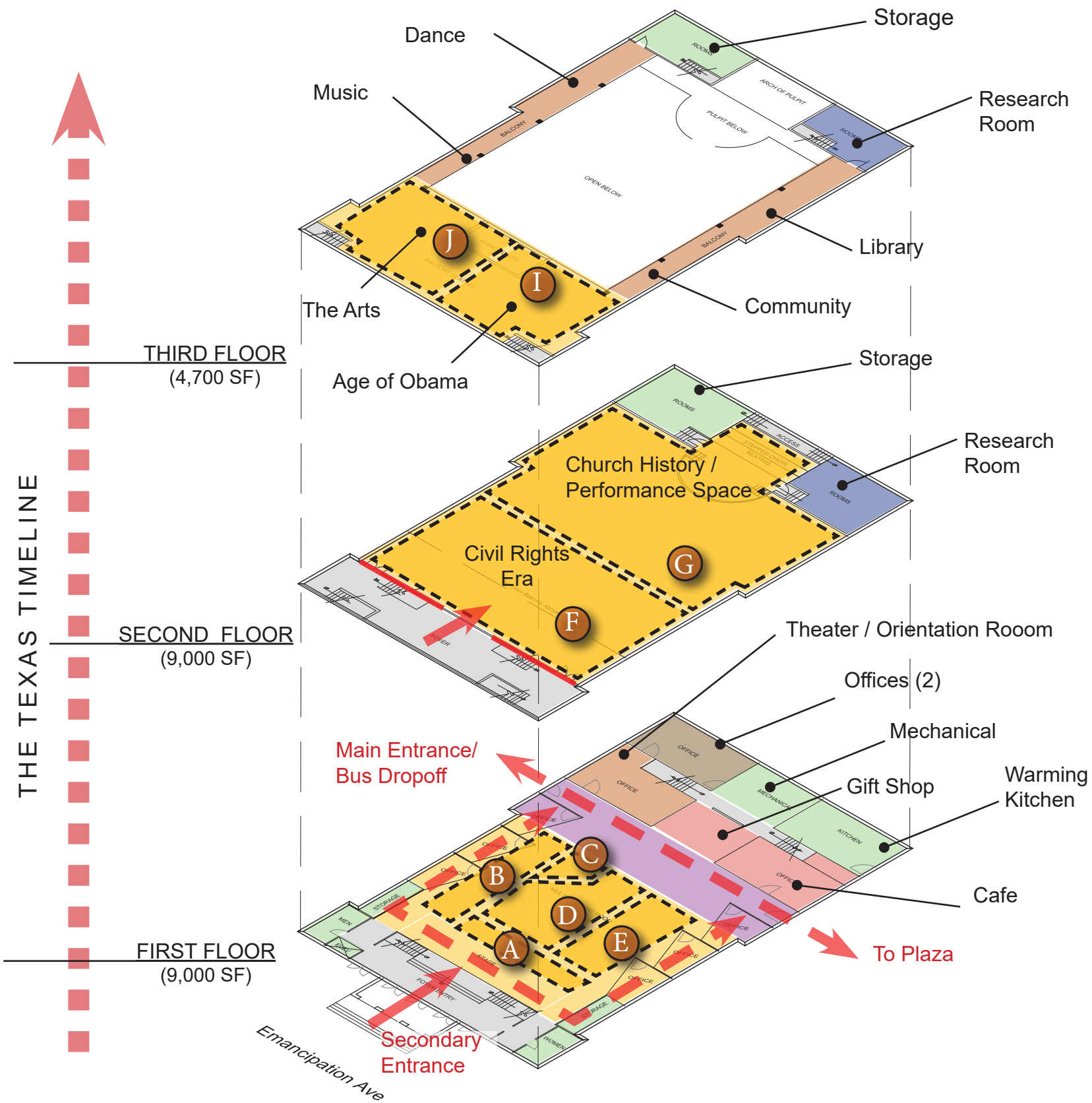
Outdoor Exhibits









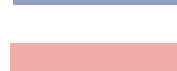

Outdoor Exhibits













Covington Gardens



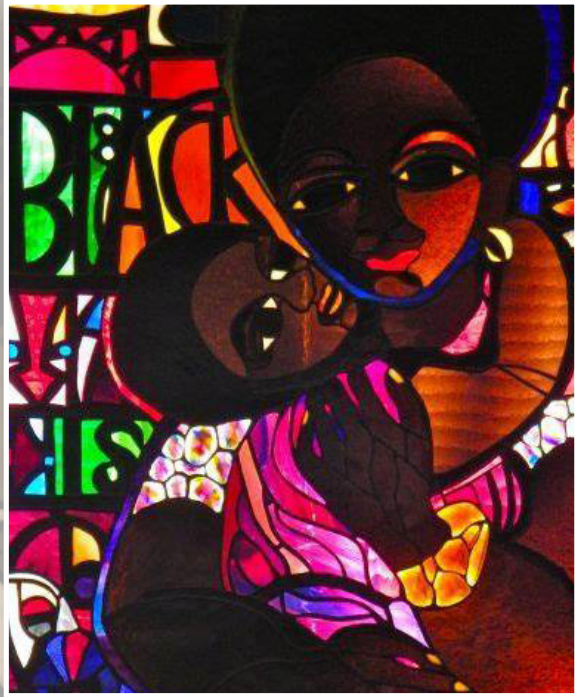
**FLOOR PLAN LEGEND**

-  Exhibit Space
-  Administrative
-  Circulation
-  Building Support
-  Program Space
-  Classroom, Research
-  Retail (Gift Shop, Cafe)
-  Welcome Center

**EXHIBITIONS**

- |                                                                                         |                               |                                                                                         |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
|  A | Slave Trade                   |  F | Performance space |
|  B | African Civilizations 12-16th |  G | Civil Rights Era  |
|  C | Century                       |  H | Church History    |
|  D | Bigotry                       |  I | The Arts          |
|  E | 1619-1865                     |  J | Age of Obama      |





*“Windows keep alive memories as they emit a golden radiance that time cannot dim.”*  
*Naomi Carrier, TCAALH*

Stained Glass Windows



Exhibitions - Permanent and/or Rotating



**ANCHOR PROGRAMS**

- Gallery exhibitions
- Black American Music Series
- Tours year round
- Heritage film Festival
- Youth Enrichment Program
- Spoken Word/Poetry Slam
- Kwanzaa Celebration
- Juneteenth Celebration
- Dance Classes and Concert
- Literary Book Club



Performance - Music / Dance













