



September 12, 2017

The African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund

Recent events in Charlottesville, Virginia and elsewhere, and the national debate they have engendered about the ways our collective past is represented in our culture and public spaces, create both a unique opportunity and compelling responsibility for leading organizations in our country. We believe now is the time to come together to carry the national narrative beyond Confederate heritage, make a bold commitment to celebrating the many overlooked contributions of the African American community, and make an important and lasting contribution to the cultural landscape of our country.

For decades, the National Trust has been committed to the goal of ensuring the full American experience is represented in the places we save. As the national non-profit leader and advocate for the protection of significant places and cultural landscapes, we help cities and towns across the country protect and reuse their unique and irreplaceable historic resources. We also manage a network of historic sites to model best practices in stewardship, interpretation, and programming. And we promote investment in historic urban neighborhoods and Main Streets to help support vital, equitable, resilient, and healthy communities.

Through the creation of an African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, we aspire to at least double our own programmatic efforts over a period of several years, and establish a new grant fund for the protection and restoration of places of significant African American history that are in peril. By drawing attention to the remarkable—and still largely unrecognized—collection of places and stories in our midst evoking centuries of African American activism, architecture, and achievement, we will fill an important gap in our cultural heritage landscape, inspire a new generation, and further our vision of a stronger, more united America where all our stories are reflected in the places that surround us.

These funds will be used to advance:

Taking Direct Action to Protect National Treasures Important in the African American Story: For seven decades, the National Trust has intervened directly when places of national significance are threatened. From legal and legislative expertise to intervention grants to community organizing, no other non-profit organization brings more resources to bear to keep the past alive and vibrant in communities nationwide. In the past five years alone, the National Trust has invested nearly \$2.5 million—and leveraged more than \$10 million—to preserve dozens of important African American sites, including:

- Virginia's Fort Monroe, a critical Civil War site of self-emancipation;
- The Pauli Murray Center, home of civil rights attorney and National

- Organization of Women founder Pauli Murray in Durham;
- Fort Huachuca Black Officers Club, an important western military outpost for African Americans in Arizona;
- Madame C.J. Walker’s Villa Lewaro on the Hudson River, home to the nation’s first self-made female millionaire;
- Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom, site of the nation’s second-largest slave market made famous in the movie *Twelve Years a Slave*; and
- Rosenwald Schools—created by Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington for the education of black students throughout the South.

We seek to expand this work by dramatically increasing the number of sites where we are involved and taking direct action to save these landmarks.

Providing Grants to African American Cultural Heritage Sites:

Building on the success of earlier and ongoing capacity-building and grant-making programs, the National Trust would also use resources from the Fund to aid communities engaged in grassroots preservation of African-American historic sites. This work would be modelled on the success of the National Fund for Sacred Places, a collaboration with the Partners for Sacred Places and the Lilly Endowment, Inc., which over a 5-year period is providing \$15 million in capacity building and brick-and-mortar matching grants to dozens of qualified congregations of all faiths. We will also build on lessons learned through the Save America’s Treasures program and the National Trust’s and American Express Foundation’s 10-year/\$15 million Partners in Preservation program.

Empowering Youth Through HOPE Crew: “Providing Hands-on-Preservation-Experience,” HOPE Crews train young people in preservation trades while completing restoration work on historic sites. Over the past three years, hundreds of HOPE Crew members have undertaken projects preserving important African American stories at places like Louisiana’s African House, Martin Luther King’s birthplace in Atlanta, and New Jersey’s Hinchliffe Stadium, one of the last remaining Negro League stadiums. HOPE Crew creates a brighter future for a new, diverse generation of preservation professionals by teaching critical skills while restoring sites that reflect the full American experience.

Uncovering African American Stories at Historic Sites: The National Trust touches a remarkable network of historic sites and house museums, from our own 27 National Trust Historic Sites to hundreds of affiliated places nationwide. Many of these places have significant stories and places of resonance to the African American community, from James Madison’s Montpelier to the African American Meeting House in Boston to South Carolina’s Drayton Hall. At our sites, we model archeological work, interpretation, research, restoration, arts, and educational programing that help visitors see, understand, and honor the African American story at these diverse places. With additional funding, we will expand and disseminate this work through our national networks, and provide guidance and examples of best practices for more sites to replicate and adapt.

Advocating for Underrepresented Communities: For decades, the Trust has been a leader in advocating for stronger federal programs and funding to preserve and honor America’s underrepresented stories. In recent years, our

work has resulted in increased federal funding and/or national monument designations for iconic places such as the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument in Alabama, the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park in Maryland, and the Pullman National Monument in Chicago. The Trust has also advocated for funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the African American Civil Rights Grant Program, and competitive grants for National Register listings for underrepresented communities. Funding for these programs grew from \$500,000 in FY 2015 to \$17.5 million in FY 2017.

Promoting Cities That Work for Everyone: As part of the Trust’s focus on the vitality, equity, and resilience of cities—an effort we call ReUrbanism—we aim to understand better the relationship between inequality in its myriad forms and the built fabric of cities. Our research demonstrates that blocks of older, smaller, mixed-age buildings are home to people of all backgrounds and tend to provide affordable space for housing and women- and minority-owned businesses. In collaboration with city leaders and policymakers, we have put this research to work in pilot cities such as Detroit, Miami, and Philadelphia. Through additional research and expanding our work into new pilot cities, we seek to propel the reuse and preservation of existing structures to serve contemporary needs, inform national conversations around equity, affordability, displacement, and reinvestment, and shape public policy and preservation practice in evidence-based ways to promote inclusive, affordable, and just communities.

Engaging Advisors and the Media

The National Trust has long benefitted from the engagement and counsel of leaders in the African American community and has enlisted a number of historians, scholars and civic leaders to advise on this initiative, including:

- Lonnie Bunch, Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
- Ava DuVernay, director of the Oscar-nominated film *Selma*
- Henry Louis Gates, Director of the Hutchins Center for African American Studies, Harvard University
- Sherrilyn Ifill, Director General, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- Robert Stanton, Former Director, National Park Service
- Bryan Stevenson, Director of Equal Justice Initiative

To raise awareness and enlist others in this effort, we will also undertake a media campaign to mobilize support for the Fund among foundations, corporations, and individual donors. The campaign will include outreach to elite media outlets, social media, and paid advertising. The Ford Foundation and the National Trust have committed to supporting the cost of this outreach.

Our work has always brought communities together around the places that define them. Through the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, we can help tell our nation’s full story and build a brighter future for all.