



PRESS RELEASE



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Getty and Los Angeles City Planning Launch African American Historic Places Project

Project will identify, protect, and celebrate the city’s Black heritage



St. Elmo Village, est. 1969, Mid-City. Photo: Elizabeth Daniels, © J. Paul Getty Trust.

St. Elmo Village, an artists’ enclave occupying a compound of ten small Craftsman bungalows in a colorful garden setting, was founded in 1969 by artists Roderick and Rozell Sykes as a place where children and adults could explore their creativity. Since then, St. Elmo’s—incorporated as a nonprofit in 1971—has hosted art workshops, festivals, and other programs to benefit the community and engage local youth.

LOS ANGELES—Getty and the Los Angeles City Planning announced today the [Los Angeles African American Historic Places Project](#), an ambitious project to identify, protect and celebrate African American heritage within the city.

Historic preservation can be a powerful force in addressing social justice by empowering local communities to effect positive change. Despite comprehensive efforts over the years to record Los Angeles’ historic places, the city’s historic designation programs do not yet reflect the depth and breadth of African American history. Just over three percent of the city’s 1,200 designated local landmarks are linked to African American heritage.

Over the next three years, the project will work with local communities and cultural institutions to more fully recognize and understand African American experiences in Los Angeles. The work aims to identify and help preserve the places that best represent these stories and work with communities to develop creative approaches that meet their own aims for placemaking, identity, and empowerment.

The project is led by the Getty Conservation Institute and the Office of Historic Resources (OHR) within Los Angeles’ Department of City Planning, which is responsible for the management of historic resources within the city. A robust community engagement program will create a space for meaningful input and local partnerships, drawing upon community-based knowledge of lesser-known histories.



Magnificent Brothers Barber Shop, est. 1970, Crenshaw. Photo: Elizabeth Daniels, © J. Paul Getty Trust.

Barber shops, such as Magnificent Brothers—in operation in the Crenshaw district since 1970— could be found eligible for listing based on their social significance to the community.



“Historic preservation is about the acknowledgment and elevation of places and stories. The point of this work is to make sure that the stories and places of African Americans in Los Angeles are more present and complete than previously,” says Tim Whalen, John E. and Louise Bryson Director at the Getty Conservation Institute. “The work is also about making sure that preservation methods are examined for systemic bias. It’s ultimately about equity.”

Before embarking on this project, Getty and the city convened a virtual roundtable composed of a group of national and local thought leaders with experience in urban planning, historic preservation, African American history, and/or grassroots and community organizing. Their discussions of diversity and inclusion in preservation policy helped shape the initiative and its goals. In particular, their input shed light on existing processes and practices that perpetuate biases in how places are recognized and protected, and helped expose current preservation policies that prevent the conservation of places of importance to Black communities.

“This project will illuminate overlooked narratives and historic places important to Los Angeles and our nation that deserve protection and recognition,” says Brent Leggs, executive director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund at the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a member of the project’s initial advisory committee. “Through public and private partnership, the Getty and City of Los Angeles can model broader reform in the U.S. preservation field and can work proactively at the local government and city levels to grow pathways for equitable interpretation and community-driven preservation.”

This project will include research to rethink and potentially expand the heritage preservation toolkit. This involves examining how current historic preservation and planning processes and policies may be reinforcing systemic racism. It will also work to bring new and improved processes that address injustices and bring greater inclusion and diversity to historic preservation practices. This may include, for example, developing or adapting approaches to better recognize, protect and sustain social values and preserve intangible aspects of heritage that communities cherish.

The initial phase of this project will also provide a framework for identifying and evaluating properties relating to African American history in Los Angeles. In 2018 OHR completed a [framework](#) for identifying African American heritage in the city, drawing upon nine themes that included civil rights, deed restriction and segregation, religion and spirituality, social clubs and organizations, and visual arts. The project will include deeper citywide community engagement around this framework and allow for the report’s potential expansion.



Holman United Methodist Church, 1958, Jefferson Park, architect Kenneth Nels Lind. Photo: Elizabeth Daniels, © J. Paul Getty Trust.

As the African American population of such areas as West Adams and Jefferson Park began growing in the 1940s, new Black churches were founded. One of the most influential was Holman United Methodist, which commissioned architect Kenneth Nels Lind to design this sanctuary in 1958.

“As the largest planning department in the United States, City Planning is uniquely positioned to chart a course for a more fair, equitable, and just Los Angeles for future generations, in part, through cultural heritage and education,” said Director of Planning Vince Bertoni. “We are excited to highlight this broader range of values and history that better represents our diverse city.”

In addition to rethinking the preservation toolkit, the project will include official historic designation of a number of African American historic places by the city. The work of the project will also extend beyond traditional preservation tools to address the development of broader cultural preservation strategies with selected historically Black communities.

The project will also provide opportunities for emerging history, preservation and planning professionals through dedicated paid internships. Additionally, Getty and OHR will soon launch a search for a consultant project leader to further develop, manage, and implement the work of this project, under the guidance of a soon to be established local advisory committee representing key stakeholders in the city’s African American communities.

“The history of Los Angeles is incomplete without recognition of the African American individuals and institutions that shaped the economic, cultural and civic narrative of the region,” says Susan D. Anderson, history curator and program manager at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles and a member of the project’s initial advisory committee. “This important project will expand how heritage is defined and will provide an opportunity to work with local

communities and residents to unearth stories that are vital to our understanding of the place we call home.”



Brockman Gallery, 1967–90, Leimert Park. Photo: Elizabeth Daniels, © J. Paul Getty Trust.
From 1967–90, this row of storefronts was occupied by the Brockman Gallery. The Black-owned gallery exhibited works of both emerging and established African American artists and helped forge a thriving Black art and business community in Leimert Park.

The City of Los Angeles and the Getty Conservation Institute have worked together for nearly two decades on local heritage projects. Their joint efforts include [SurveyLA](#), a citywide survey of historic places that was conducted from 2010 through 2017.

SurveyLA covered the entire City of Los Angeles—over 880,000 legal parcels in an area of almost 500 square miles—and identified resources dating from approximately 1865 to 1980. The data from SurveyLA was used to create [HistoricPlacesLA](#), a website launched in 2015 that allows the public to explore these places.

The announcement follows the Getty Research Institute and the USC School of Architecture’s recent [joint acquisition](#) of the archives of Paul R. Williams, one of the most significant African American architects of the 20th century. Several Williams buildings are already designated historic landmarks in Los Angeles, including the 28th Street YMCA and Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. The project also complements the Getty Research Institute’s [African American Art History Initiative](#), which focuses on the postwar art and cultural legacy of artists of African American and African diasporic heritage.

The new initiative also builds upon the work of City Planning, in establishing the Office of Racial Justice, Equity, and Transformative Planning in 2020 in response to Mayor Eric Garcetti’s [Executive Order No. 27 on Racial Equity in City Government](#). Through the office, City Planning is



comprehensively confronting how land use policies and zoning practices have reinforced racial segregation, environmental injustice, and poor health outcomes.

More information about the project will be announced as work continues.

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