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Acknowledgement, Education, Memory: Reframing the Cemetery Landscapes of the Enslaved

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, EDUCATION, MEMORY:
REFRAMING THE CEMETERY LANDSCAPES OF THE
ENSLAVED**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Landscape Architecture

in

The Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture

by
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ABSTRACT

The landscape holds onto the nearly imperceivable cemeteries of the formerly enslaved population that have been erased through time, development, and censure of historical narratives in Louisiana. Immediate action is necessary to retie censured chronicles of enslavement to the landscape, educating the public on deep-rooted systemic racism in the contemporary environment. This thesis aims to provide reparations to the Black and descendant communities of southern Louisiana. This work acknowledges the remaining cemetery fragments, reframing and knitting them together as a network of spaces that uphold a more holistic memory of the past.

The role of landscape architecture extends beyond site specific design, creating nested interventions that layer land policy, institutional support, and memorial landscape design. Each layer acts as a sieve, filtering accessibility from educational resources to the specific cemetery locations of the formerly enslaved. Ultimately focusing on providing safe and physical access to Black and descendent communities. An educational institution brings together multi-disciplinary resources that advocate for, provide monetary support to, and further research the preservation of enslaved cemeteries. Traditional notions of preservation are challenged; moving away from systems architectural merit and laborious compilation site history that dominates historical landscape preservation. Instead, a network of cemetery sites protected through land easements argues the larger contextual importance of slavery in the state and national dialogue. To create a barrier of privacy between educational and physical access, a series of road-side memorials interventions are designed. Together, layered approaches of policy, education, and design can be utilized in landscape architecture to engage with complex site and audience challenges. Despite the focus on Louisiana, this work is applicable broader the United States who have historic legacies of slavery nestled within their landscape.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The southern Louisiana landscape surrounding the Mississippi river reveals the ubiquity of plantation culture. Reflections of life during the Antebellum slavery period are visible from the sugar cane fields to the plantation tourism business. Through the last century, the land has been populated by greater industry and leading to significant private parceling. Even still, relationships between the land, river, rail lines, and industry disproportionately highlight the economic successes of Antebellum period that have led to contemporary growth. The people who were forcibly enslaved to work the land, however, have been systemically removed from the landscape's discernable history.¹ Through the lens of landscape architecture, we observe the subtle changes in landforms that are often overlooked. Despite the erasure of the enslaved populations through time, development, and censored historical narratives, the environment holds onto nearly imperceivable markers of their legacy. In order to better recognize the enslaved population, we must acknowledge the remaining fragments, reframing them as a larger network of spaces that uphold a more holistic memory of the past.

When travelling along River Road from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, rows of fields span across the horizon. The rhythms of crop rows and furrows create a predictable pattern, occasionally obscured by swampy regions of trees that hug the property edges. Trucks carrying harvested sugarcane dominate the road, small pieces of sugarcane fronds litter the roadside. The discerning eye however catches the brief upright tree standing starkly among the fields, and notices when the treelined edges become more dense and visually impenetrable. These breaks in the constant monotony of the plantation landscape are indicative of the most powerful memorials of Louisiana history. Within the swampy waters and shaded parcels of lone trees lies the remains of the enslaved people of Louisiana.

In 1860 the enslaved population of Louisiana was 326,726, while the white population was 351,556. Free People of Color accounted for an additional 18,547, with just 173 "Indians".² Where then, are the other half of the population buried? The enslaved cemetery lands are an often-imperceptible feature of the Louisiana landscape and are reflective of our greater struggle to recognize racist and disenfranchising structures that exist in the United States today. These

¹ Within this text I will use the word "enslaved" to describe African and Black people who were stolen from their countries and generationally forced into bondage. Enslaved connotes that this is an action forced upon a person or group, rather than a description of a state of being as a "slave".

² U.S. Census Bureau, "Population of the United States in 1860: Louisiana," Accessed Jan 12, 2022, <<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-16.pdf>>

structures co-exist with prevalent narratives of Louisiana's history that downplay and deny the horrifying history of slavery in the United States, casually overlooked for the convenience of economic growth coupled with avoidance of responsibility.³ We owe the enslaved individuals a respectful and holistic acknowledgement of their lives and subsequent memorials, as well as reparations to descendant Black communities who have continued to be harmed by structural racism.

Descendant and Black communities and their respective organizations deserve perpetual access to enslaved cemetery land that exists on former plantations. In southern Louisiana along the Mississippi River, these burial sites are being lost to industrial expansion, climate change, and time. This research reframes the enslaved cemetery within the riverine landscape as a space of power and collective memory deserving of reverence. The goal of this project is to provide families access to ancestral burial sites, protect the enslaved cemeteries from further erasure, and educate the public on their cultural importance. To address these goals, four primary methods emerged: (1) Policy and supportive designed infrastructure that provides access to and perpetual care funding for cemetery sites. (2) An educational installation that focuses on the enslaved experience and uplifts narratives that showcase the cultural importance of the enslaved population. This space also serves as an experiential gallery that allows visitors to sensorially engage with the sacred cemetery without physically endangering an existing site. (3) A series of design suggestions formed in engagement with Black and descendant communities to develop their own access and ceremonial strategies at cemetery sites. (4) Network of in situ design markers that help highlight the prevalence of these spaces in our everyday environment, bringing the stories of the enslaved into a collective public memory. In order to challenge traditional landscape practice which often focuses on a singular site, this work develops a network of placemaking, physical design, policy, education, and land protections (Figure 1). When engaging in projects that span beyond site specific design, the landscape can serve as a storytelling device without heavy manipulation of the existing environment.

³ Whitney Plantation, "Slavery In Louisiana," History, Last Accessed Jan 12, 2022. <https://www.whitneyplantation.org/history/slavery-in-louisiana/>.

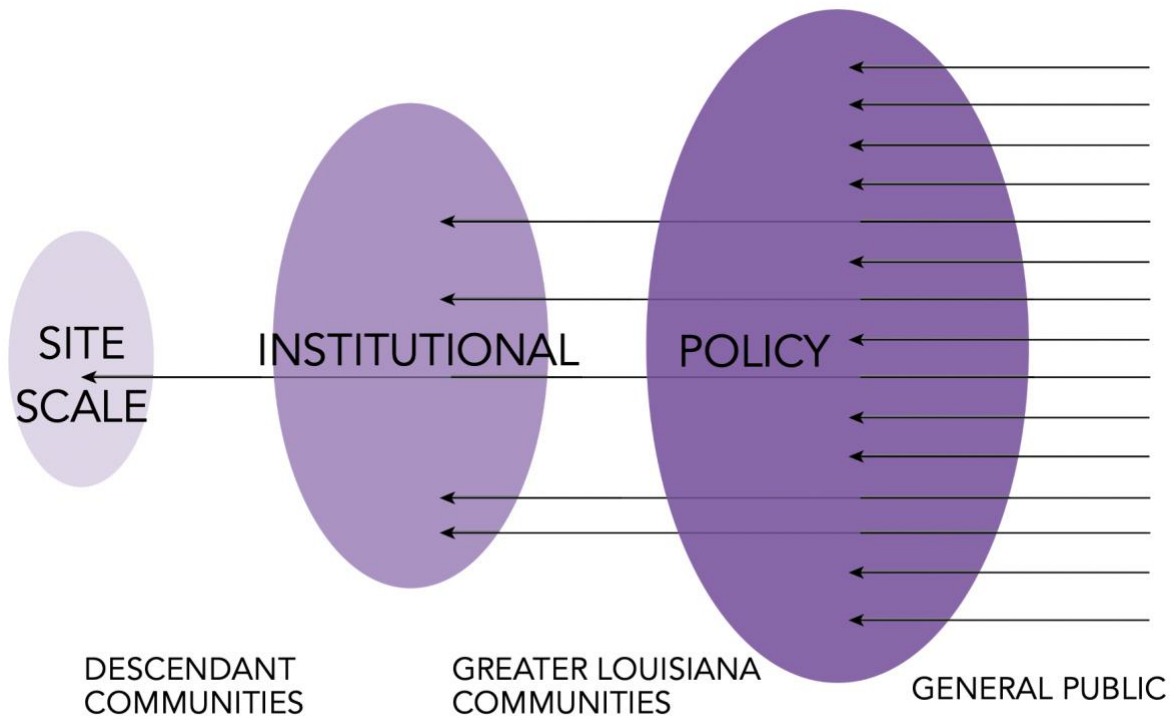


Figure 1. Diagram showing the layered design work that addresses different scales and audiences.

The enslaved cemetery is not a neutral plot of land that is easily accessible. Existing in thousands of fragments across the former plantation properties, these spaces now are landlocked on private land, sequestered from communities of color. According to Forensic Architecture, between 1940 and 2021, identifiable landscape anomalies consistent with enslaved cemeteries have decreased from 1200 to only 350 within the data region⁴ termed “Death Alley”.⁵ Many of these anomalies have been plowed over and are now sitting under petrochemical plants. Others have been destroyed through environmental forces such as hurricanes, shifting waterways, and persistent flooding. Their dwindling numbers caused by human and environmental threats show the endangerment of the enslaved cemetery landscape (Figure 2).⁶ To ensure the cemeteries are available to present and future descendent communities, definitive action is necessary. Landscape architecture’s sensitivity to the combined spatial and cultural intricacies of the cemeteries’ existence can offer means to combat their endangerment.

⁴ The Death Alley region sits along the Mississippi River between Donaldsonville, LA and New Orleans, LA.

⁵ Forensic Architecture, “Environmental Racism in Death Alley, Louisiana,” July 4, 2021, London, UK.

⁶ Forensic Architecture, “Environmental Racism,” (65-68).

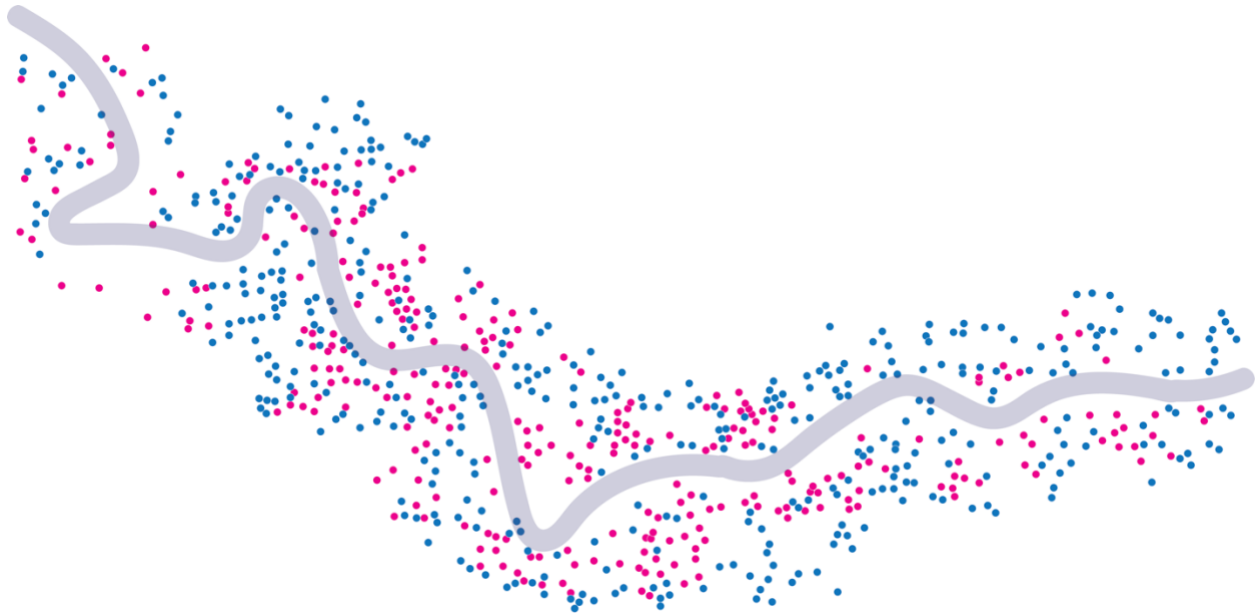


Figure 2. Cemetery Anomalies in "Death Alley," Louisiana. This figure diagrams the cemetery anomalies discovered by Forensic Architecture. The blue markers showcase cemeteries that were present in 1940 but have since been removed. The pink markers highlight the remaining anomalies along the Mississippi River as of 2021. *Data Source:* Forensic Architecture. "Environmental Racism in Death Alley, Louisiana." July 4, 2021. London, UK.

Within the field of Landscape Architecture, there has been a renewed call to explore a multitude of histories, especially where the landscape has been complicit in acts of racism and disenfranchisement. In 2020, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) added a "Racial Equity Plan of Action". Their action plan focuses on acknowledging racism in the profession, re-evaluating the systems that ASLA has established, and committing to greater accountability. Additionally, the ASLA strives to develop dispersible content that educates professionals on the advancement of racial equity.⁷ In practice, landscape architects are responsible for taking on projects that promote equitable access to greenspace and ancestral land to support disenfranchised communities. While the ASLA works directly with current and emerging professionals, discourse in academic journals has also called for greater commitment to scholarship in diversity, equity, and inclusion. In 2007, *Landscape Journal*, a premier scholarly journal of landscape architecture, dedicated their 25th anniversary volume to a collection of articles titled "Race, Space, and Destabilization of Practice". Edited by Diane Harris, this collection acknowledged the lack of critical literature that included issues of race and landscape.⁸

⁷ "Racial Equity Plan of Action," ASLA, 2020, <https://www.asla.org/racialequityplan.aspx>.

⁸ Dianne Harris, "Editors Note," *Landscape Journal* 26, (2007): iv.

Since then, influential books like “Black Landscapes Matter” edited by Walter Hood and Grace Mitchell Tada (2020) have exposed the ways landscape architecture has been used as a tool for erasure of Black culture and history. In turn, prompting a reevaluation of the ways we recognize and reconcile the histories of landscape in America. While the evolution of literature exploring diverse and divergent narratives has grown between Harris’s brief call to action in 2007⁹ and the present, Hood and Tada’s work highlights the extensive lack of acknowledgement of Black perspectives, accomplishments, and influences in our landscape practice.

These influences are especially obscured in Louisiana through familiarity of agricultural landscapes. People have become desensitized to the landscape’s legacy by the regularity of the fields in daily viewsheds combined with the glorification of plantations architecture that lacks the context of slavery. Our nation’s designed and preserved landscapes reflect the beliefs and structures we hold as most important but are also influenced by the viewpoints of those with the greatest political and economic power. The legibility of a landscape is often reflective of the power and influence supporting its continuing care. Along the Mississippi River, the plantation typology is most visible. Road-signs marketing plantation tours provide incentives to turn off I-10 and demarcate plantation big house tours and their respective beautiful¹⁰ grounds as the dominant attractions. Plantations host weddings, events, summer camps, spas, restaurants, and botanical gardens. The Louisiana Travel website, published by the Louisiana Office of Tourism highlights the “Historic Homes” along river road, vivaciously named the “Plantation Parade”. They focus on the architectural styles of mansion construction and tours of the lavish homes of the past, venerating the families whose wealth sustained them.¹¹ But what of the enslaved artisans such as those who crafted the iconic ironwork railings and architectural features beloved by Louisiana residents and visitors?¹²

Nearly half the Louisiana population in 1860 was enslaved individuals, but when referencing historical narratives of the properties, their stories are not half of the canon.¹³ The challenge remains of how to respectfully share the brutal accounts of violence, suppression, family separation, and destruction of cultural heritage. In these stories people, power, and

⁹ Dianne Harris, “Race, Space, and the Destabilization of Practice,” *Landscape Journal* 26, (2007): 1-9.

¹⁰ Many see plantation landscapes in the south through an antebellum nostalgia. Equating grandeur and old growth oaks as the southern landscape ideal. I however, find them unsettling and haunting.

¹¹ Louisiana Travel, “Discover Plantation Parade”. Accessed January 27, 2022.
<https://www.louisianatravel.com/articles/discover-plantation-parade>

¹² James E. Newton, “Slave Artisans and Craftsmen: The Roots of Afro-American Art,” *The Black Scholar* 9, (November 1977), (3): 39.

¹³ US Census Bureau, “Population 1860.”

landscape are intrinsically linked, the land acting as both a tool for violence and a monument to the legacy of slavery. There are two innovative and respected institutions within the larger plantation network that interpret the enslaved experience and their significant contributions to Louisiana's history: The Whitney Plantation, and the River Road African American Museum. These institutions are leaders in education, research, and storytelling. But, both cater to visitors who are self-selecting to learn more about enslavement and racism. Located nearly halfway between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, they require transportation, forethought, and awareness to visit. The network of enslaved cemeteries along River Road and beyond creates a rare opportunity to stitch these important narratives into our everyday public memory. But, most importantly Black residents and descendant communities deserve access to spaces that reflect their history and memory. They require access to spaces of memory and generational storytelling that they have explicit control over. Returning enslaved cemeteries to Black and descendent communities coupled with support is essential in working towards a more equitable Louisiana landscape.

Process and Methods

This thesis began as an exploration of the physical relationships between known enslaved cemeteries and land features such as rivers and their tributaries, tree canopy, natural and manmade levees, and agricultural fields. The land features were compared with the layouts of plantation grounds, buildings, slave cabins, and factory or manufacturing areas. Supplemented with historical narratives, the relationships between land features and plantation layout determined that the enslaved cemetery was usually situated on bayou edges. The land was unproductive and could not be used for agriculture. It wasn't until Forensic Architecture (FA) published "Environmental Racism in Death Alley, Louisiana" in 2021,¹⁴ that a significant dataset of cemeteries was established. This body of research layered historical maps, satellite imagery, and other data to determine landscape anomalies consistent with markers of enslaved cemeteries. Their work substantiated both the prevalence of the cemeteries and highlighted the fragility of their existence. The scale of Forensic Architecture's mapping efforts has grounded my research with an existing body of data. Once a body of cemeteries was discovered, the thesis took form, seeking to provide Black and enslaved descendant families access to ancestral burial sites,

¹⁴ Forensic Architecture, "Environmental Racism."

protect the enslaved cemeteries from further erasure, and educate the public on their cultural importance

The thesis research is broken into three main sections: Acknowledgement, Education, and Memory. Each part utilizes an aspect of landscape architecture to reframe the ways we respond to preserving, researching, and retuning cemeteries of the enslaved. The acknowledgement section lays out the cultural and historical intersections of people, power, and landscape, situating the enslaved cemeteries as integral parts of the Louisiana Environment. Next, the acknowledgment section breaks down cemetery sites that represent different relationships between perceptibility, accessibility, activism, urban and rural context, and degree of original integrity of the site. This research then explores the lack of preservation policy in Louisiana legislature for the cemeteries and argues for systems of land easements to reclaim and provide access to the cemeteries.

The Education section outlines the necessity of development of trust between landowners, stakeholders, and community members. In turn I propose the Center for Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes. The cemetery landscape center combines educational intuitional partners with outside researchers, creating a collaborative environment to advance studies on and policy supporting enslaved cemeteries. The cemetery landscape center also contains an educational exhibition that showcases both the immersive power of the enslaved cemeteries and their cultural significance.

The Memory section focuses primarily on design, and design inspiration through funerary ritual. It begins by sharing enslaved burial rituals and funeral ceremonies. These rituals are then explored as landscape themes. The themes help to inform three designed features. The first is the exhibition as part of the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes. The exhibition provides a place for learning that does not trespass on the cemetery land. The second design portion focuses on design strategies developed with community input that provide access to Black and descendant communities to ancestral burial land. Finally, the third design creates a network of landscape installations that brings the enslaved cemetery to the forefront of public memory. Both the second and third design proposals are situated within the landscape.

CHAPTER 2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This section focuses on recognizing the cultural and historical intersections of people, power, and landscape, situating the enslaved cemeteries as integral parts of the Louisiana environment. The enslaved cemeteries and the people buried within, provide vital insight into the continuum of land use, cultural and economic development, and systemic racism in Louisiana. Many of the landforms we recognize in the agricultural vocabulary are based in deeper African American historical roots. To explore the site, cultural context, and timeline of transition of enslaved cemeteries in Louisiana, five sites are selected that represent different relationships of perceptibility, accessibility, activism, urban and rural context, and degree of original integrity of the site. Finally, this section recognizes policy and land easement actions that can be taken to return the cemeteries to Black descendant communities. Additionally, the protections seek to limit further erasure of the cemeteries from the Louisiana landscape.

The Land

Everyone has a right to be represented in the experience of the landscape, to feel a connection with the land and subsequently to hold space. In order to create more equitable access to the land, first comes admitting the ways that landscape architecture has been utilized to harm Black and Indigenous peoples. While the scope of this project focuses specifically on the enslaved and descendant Black communities, Indigenous peoples are essential to the history of the area. The project region encompasses the land of the Chitimacha, Houma, Muskhogean, and Choctaw.¹⁵ The borders defined by European mapmakers are nebulous and incomplete based on their limited knowledge of extensive Native cultures. However, they do imply the belonging of Indigenous people within relationships fostered between the land and people. More specifically, one of the sites within my study, the Point Houmas cemetery, can be traced back to the Houma Tribe. Whereby land speculators exploited the transition of different ruling countries' land grants, determining the Houma to be trespassers. The land tract still holds the Houma name, despite their forced removal nearly 220 years prior.^{16, 17} The erasures of Indigenous and Black

¹⁵ "Map of Indian Tribes of Louisiana in 1700." State Library of Louisiana. Louisiana Works Progress Administration. Unknown Date. <https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/state-lwp%3A1857>

¹⁶ John Francis Claiborne, Hamtramck, Cyrus T. Bemiss, and John Slidell, *The Houmas land claim: a letter from John Claiborne, Esq., to the Honorable C.T. Bemiss : accompanied by a letter from the Honorable John Slidell to Mr. Claiborne*, New Orleans: Printed at the Delta Job Office, 1859.

¹⁷ "All settles, therefore, upon any portion of the lands included within the alleged limits of the Houmas claim, confirmed as above stated, in 1806, have been from the beginning, and are still trespassers, either against the United

communities from the Louisiana landscape have many parallels. Today, a limited group of curated Indigenous historic cultural landscapes remain. Further, those landscapes that remain do not adequately showcase the diverse pre-European civilizations.

Instead, we see the land parceling techniques employed by the French, Spanish, and English inscribed in the earth along the Mississippi river. The French Arpent system bounds the river in, hugging the meanders, and marking the necessities of the plantation system. This land surveying technique ensured each property had river-front access for business and transportation. It also guaranteed that the replenishment of nutrients via the river flooding to the agricultural fields, creating channelized irrigation that could be plowed with minimal turning of equipment.¹⁸ The plantations organization then responded to small changes in topography along the tracts. The big house and manufacturing buildings were set on natural levees and high grounds. Periodically flooded lands served for extensive agriculture such as sugar cane and cotton.¹⁹ Consistently inundated waterways formed thin swamp tendrils that were deemed unfit for farming.²⁰ These swamps grew into densely wooded and protected spaces that contrasted the high exposure of the agricultural fields. Ultimately forming the environment where many of the cemeteries of the formerly enslaved are located.

States – if the Spanish grant should be held to have been invalid, or not to have covered the area confirmed by the Board”

¹⁸ Richard Campanella, “Arpents, Ligas, and Acres: The cadastral system left cultural fingerprints on Louisiana’s landscape,” 64 Parishes. <https://64parishes.org/arpents-ligas-and-acres>.

¹⁹ Persac, Marie Adrien, Benjamin Moore Norman, and J.H. Colton & Co, *Norman's chart of the lower Mississippi River*, New Orleans: B. M. Norman, 1858. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/78692178/>.

²⁰ Lynn Rainville, “Slave Cemeteries and Mortuary Rituals” in *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 61-62.

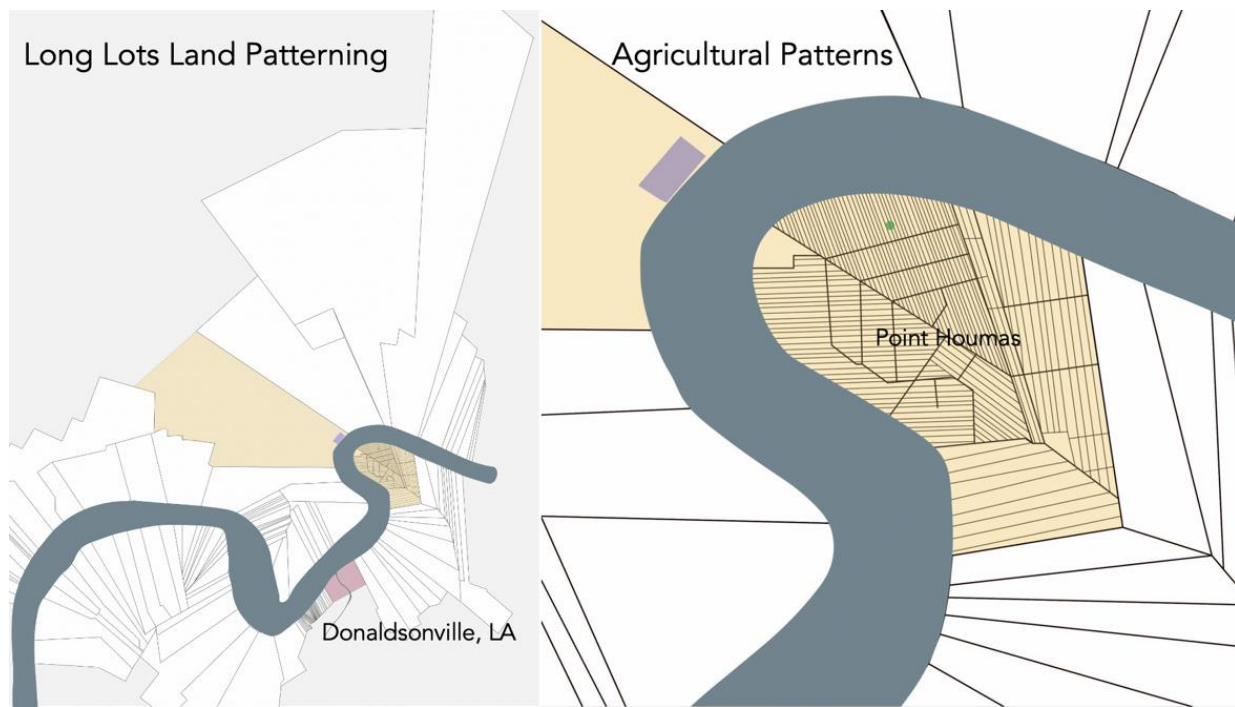


Figure 3. Diagram showcasing the land patterns along the Mississippi River and how they inform the patterns of agricultural crops and furrows.

Nestled within the bayous and swamps, the landscape offered reprieve and privacy. The swampy edges of plantations were difficult to navigate, providing little arable land. Landowners found the land unprofitable, and by their logic, a viable place for enslaved burials. The same willingness to abandon unprofitable land allowed for sheltered private space to emerge for enslaved peoples.²¹ Over time the wooded expanses were developed, carved away until all that remained were the central cemetery boundaries. Now, the remaining isolated cemeteries are still bound by drainage canals, making them difficult to access on foot (Figure 4). The long linear sightlines radiating from the river are still present today. Small streets follow property edges, while the major east-west or north-south roads exist on either edge of the property blocks. On the backside of the properties, furthest from the river, major thoroughfare roads and rail systems were eventually developed. Where once people approached the plantations from along the Mississippi River, now the land is primarily viewed from the “back of house” perspective. In addition, the constructed levee now hides the river from the lower street vantage; coupled with River Road, the water is disconnected from the parcels that once connected directly to its edge. Ultimately, the layout of the land along the Mississippi river today is directly related to the decisions made in creating the plantation landscape.

²¹ Rainville, “Slave Cemeteries and Mortuary Rituals” in *Hidden History*, 61-62.



Figure 4. Diagram of the relationships between industry, agriculture, waterways, and the Point Houmas Cemetery.

The People

Land and landscape have historically been intrinsically linked to racial discrimination and power-based violence through global systems of colonization that survive on exploited and enslaved labor to develop capital. Global systems of colonization and genocide are not unique to the United States, however, the scope of this work focuses only on the American perspective. Throughout the United States' existence, access for Black communities to land ownership and greenspace has been denied, withheld, and usurped.²² Their bodies, labor, art, and craftsmanship were controlled through force to produce the wealth of the nation. The United States owes its agricultural wealth to the enslaved peoples who were stolen and forced into labor: "In 1805 there were just over one million slaves worth about \$300 million; fifty-five years later there were four million slaves worth close to \$3 billion. In the 11 states that eventually formed the Confederacy, four out of ten people were slaves in 1860, and these people accounted for more than half the

²² Clint Smith, *How the Word is Passed* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021), 57-58.

agricultural labor in those states”.²³ Yet, there are few acknowledgments of the true nature in which the United States gained its formative capital. In our public discourse, wealthy plantation owners are lauded for their extensive business savvy, land holdings, and patronym of the arts.²⁴ These are the people remembered for developing the American landscape. Instead, our monuments should focus on the enslaved and free Black laborers that physically and emotionally created the work.

Slavery on the North American Continent predated the United States. Beginning in 1619 with the Jamestown Colony, African people were brought to what would become Virginia as indentured servants.²⁵ By 1800, it is estimated that 10 to 15 million people were transported as slaves to the Americas, numbers that represented only one-third of the original people who were seized from the African continent. The horrid conditions on slave ships and “seasoning” periods, followed by treatment during enslavement are responsible for such extensive death.²⁶ These actions were not naïve. White enslavers understood the power of community and connection to place. By stealing people from their homes, brutally shipping people across the Atlantic in the Middle Passage, and relocating them to foreign soil, they severed ties to common place. By separating members of the same states and regions, they allowed for no shared language or ritual among the enslaved.²⁷ Enslavers purposefully obliterated family structures, clothing styles, and any forms of perceptible culture.

We often recognize plantations solely by the property owner’s familial line, yet there were also generations of enslaved families that had greater physical and emotional investment in the landscape. Arguably, the enslaved people had a greater intimate connection of the land than any plantation owner did. With Emancipation, structures of slavery were abolished by law, but transitioned into a tenant farming and sharecropping systems.²⁸ Under the sharecropping system many freed African Americans continued to work and inhabit the land that they and their families had resided on during enslavement. Though the properties were still formally owned by white planters, many of the cultural spaces developed during enslavement continued to be used

²³ Roger L Ransom, “Economics of the Civil War,” Economic History Association, Last modified August 24, 2001. <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economics-of-the-civil-war/>.

²⁴ Houmas House, “History,” Accessed January 20, 2022. <https://houmashouse.com/history/>.

²⁵ James Hardy, “Slavery in America: United States’ Black Mark,” History Cooperative, March 21, 2017, <https://historycooperative.org/slavery-in-america-a-black-mark/>.

²⁶ Howard Zinn, “Drawing the Color Line” in *A People’s History of the United States*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2015 ed.), 28-30.

²⁷ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 32-33.

²⁸ Edward Royce, “The Rise of Southern Sharecropping” *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping*, (Temple University Press, 1993), 182.

well into the mid to late 20th century. Practically, many of the cemeteries of the enslaved then became predominantly Black familial burial grounds, keeping burial with kin a priority.

One example of this transition is seen in the Silvery Cemetery Study. Records of graves catalogued on *Find a Grave* show the earliest burial marker dates to 1917, with the most recent burial having occurred in 1983.²⁹ The below ground burial spaces are unmarked, or the markers have been obscured with time and groundcover growth. Despite the lack of written records of burial in the 1800s, speculative genealogy suggests descendants of those formerly enslaved here were those buried into the 1900s.³⁰ If they felt tied to be buried here, it was likely out of connections to kin. In the 1850 Slave Schedule (Figure 5) conducted in West Baton Rouge Parish there are two female children aged three years recorded for the Collins plantation³¹. In the cemetery there is a grave of a female named Mary Jones who has a birth year of 1847 (Figure 6). Given the connections familial burial plots throughout and beyond enslavement, Mary Jones could have been one of those children listed on the slave schedule. The cemeteries of the formerly enslaved are important spaces of lineage and familial strength. Though many cemeteries have been severed from generational access, living descendants are waiting to be reunited with their kin's burial site. It is widely believed that the last legacies of slavery ended after the dissolution of the sharecropping system; slavery was never truly removed from the United States Constitution. Instead, relocating system slavery to the prison-industrial complex.

²⁹ Find a Grave, "Silvery Cemetery Memorials."

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Population schedules of the seventh census of the United States, 1850, Louisiana [microform]. United States. Bureau of the Census: United States. National Archives and Records Service. Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/populationschedu0242unix/page/n243/mode/2up>

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14		4		20	m	B				14
15		5		28	F	B				15
16		6		16	m	B				16
17		7		16	F	B				17
18		8		3	F	m				18
19		9		3	F	B				19
20		10		1	F	m				20

Figure 5. The Slave Schedule for the Collins plantation where Silvery Cemetery is located. The 1850 schedule shows two female children at the age of 3, one of which would be Mary Jones. *Source:* Population schedules of the seventh census of the United States, 1850, Louisiana [microform]. United States. Bureau of the Census: United States. National Archives and Records Service.

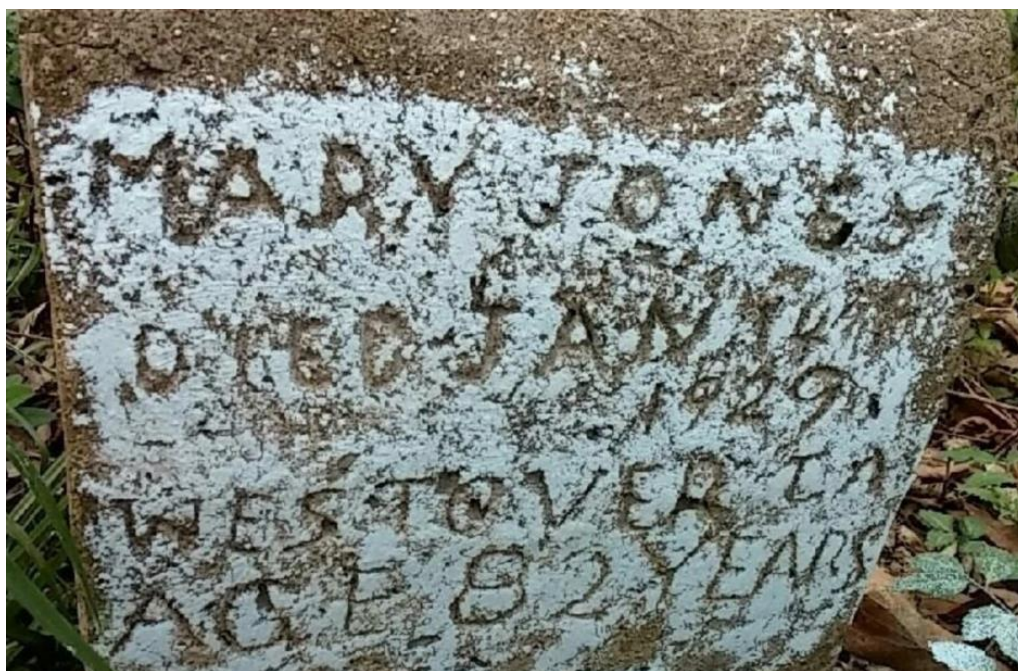


Figure 6. The Grave of Mary Jones at Silvery Cemetery. *Source:* Find a Grave, memorial page for Mary Jones (1847–14 Jan 1929), Find a Grave Memorial ID [179103146](#), citing Silvery Cemetery, West Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, USA ; Maintained by DMartin (contributor 47412082) . *Source:* Population schedules of the seventh census of the United States, 1850, Louisiana [microform]. United States. Bureau of the Census: United States. National Archives and Records Service.

Following the Civil War, the Thirteenth Amendment outlawed slavery while including the clause: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for the crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction”.³² Although the abolishment of slavery began the process of regaining inherent rights, our constitution still allows for “free labor” by incarcerated individuals. In time, transforming the legacy of the plantation system into the prison-industrial complex. As of 2019, a Black man in the U.S. after 2001 has a one in five chance of being incarcerated in their lifetime. Alternatively, a white man has a one in twenty-nine chance.³³ Today, this incarcerated labor is a billion-dollar industry.³⁴ The exploitation of Black labor in the landscape is not a relic of times past, but still a contemporary issue. In addition, as of 2021, the State of Louisiana has an incarceration rate of 1,094 (per 100,000 people of the population). Stunningly, this is higher than the US national average of 664 and higher than any other founding NATO Country.³⁵ The plantation to prison pipeline is visible in the extensive reliance on prisons for labor forces in Louisiana³⁶.

³² U.S. Constitution, Amendment XIII

³³ VERA Institute of Justice, “Incarceration Trends in Louisiana,” 2019.
<https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdffdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-louisiana.pdf>

³⁴ Business Review At Berkley, “Profiting off of Prison Labor,” 2020.
<https://businessreview.berkeley.edu/profitting-off-of-prison-labor/#:~:text=Aside%20from%20the%20federal%20prison%20industry%2C%20state-run%20prisons,facilities%20aren%E2%80%99t%20the%20only%20competitors%20in%20this%20market.>

³⁵ “Louisiana profile,” Publications, Prison Policy Initiative, last accessed April 3, 2022,
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/LA.html#:~:text=Louisiana%20has%20an%20incarceration%20rate,than%20any%20democracy%20on%20earth.>

³⁶ Smith, *How the Word is Passed*, 117.

The outcome product or service produced is more highly valued than the people who are forced or coerced to work. Collectively as landscape architects, we are guilty of the devaluation of individual and team labor. We often highlight the designers and financiers of landscape projects. We recognize the technology that pushed forward horticultural and agricultural advancements. Yet, in our recognition we fail to give credit and payment to those who have toiled in the ground and designed the agricultural machinery to make innovation possible.³⁷ Not only were the contributions to the land blotted out from historical narratives, but also the contributions to most of the built environment and artisanal works of Louisiana. As Clint Smith describes New Orleans in his book *How the Word is Passed*:

*The echo of enslavement is everywhere. It is in the levees, originally built by enslaved labor. It is in the detailed architecture of some of the city's oldest buildings, sculpted by enslaved hands. It is in the roads, first paved by enslaved people. As historian Walter Johnson has said about New Orleans, 'The whole city is a memorial to slavery'*³⁸.

Enslaved labor is in the ironwork of the city, portraiture found in the halls of the plantations, wood detailing for interiors and exteriors, and intricate metal work found in the hinges and locks of Louisiana, to name a few.³⁹ Alternatively, enslaved and free Black people are responsible for agricultural innovations. From Henry Blair's patents for corn and cotton planters, to agricultural sustainability practices developed by Booker T. Whatley, the landscape is filled with narratives of African American contributions. How do we make these contributions visible to the public? We begin by looking within the Louisiana landscape at existing spaces that could be returned to the Black public. Cemetery landscapes of the enslaved are the resting place of innovators, architects, craftsmen, storytellers and archivists, artists, and more. The cemeteries and the people interred there should be honored, sharing their stories with the Louisiana public. These cemeteries must be preserved and protected to carry on their legacy. The presence of cemeteries of the enslaved within the landscape and the challenges they have faced parallel the economically driven choices that affect our environment and human quality of life.

³⁷ "7 Contributions of Black Farmers to Agriculture," Poughkeepsie Farm Project, last modified February 4, 2017, <https://www.farmproject.org/blog/2017/2/4/hikqys8igvv0bo368aco3mrb1rv7d1>.

³⁸ Smith, *How the Word is Passed*, 6.

³⁹ Newton, "Slave Artisans and Craftsmen," 38-39.

The Sites

The remaining enslaved cemetery landscapes offer an extensive network of places that are indicative of the enslaved people's presence in the landscape. They are important cultural memorials filled with buried histories. How do we reframe the vision of cemetery landscapes of the enslaved to better illuminate what is hidden in plain sight? Further, why should it be explicitly seen? We are at a junction of change, where people are becoming more informed on the legacy of slavery in America.⁴⁰ Educating the public on diverse and divergent narratives is imperative towards working towards a more just and equitable future. To further explore visibility of cemeteries and burial culture in the southern Louisiana landscape, this thesis references a network of five sites to unravel the many connections between the access, land, agriculture, industry, development, and burial (Figure 7). Each of the five sites represents different relationships between perceptibility, accessibility, activism, urban and rural context, and degree of original integrity of the site.

The perceptibility of the site is primarily focused on the constructed burial markers and planted material, combined with the legibility to unknowing people. The coherence of the cemetery in the landscape changes the ways stakeholders interact with and advocate for or against the burial sites. Accessibility of the site was based not only on the physical ability to walk or visit the cemetery, but also the perceived safety of a visitor who travels to visit the burial site. Private land ownership can lead to issues of trespassing, putting visitors in danger of breaking local trespassing laws or engaging with defensive landowners. Throughout the site selection process, recognizing existing community activism was important. It elucidates the ways communities, corporations, and stakeholders are reacting to both destruction and preservation efforts of enslaved cemeteries.

Urban conditions are born of significant infrastructural development, leaving little to no record of the former cemeteries that were there. Alternatively, rural conditions have a greater survival rate, where the unproductive land they were sited on protects some of the cemeteries from further development. Though rural plantation land has been constructed into petrochemical plants, where large land development threatens cemeteries. Finally, the integrity of the site points to larger histories of generational burial, maintenance, and land usage. The integrity ties back to the perceptibility, with the least intact sites becoming more indicative of the swamp or wooded areas than a place of burial. The sheer number of cemeteries that likely exist are dwindling now

⁴⁰ Smith, *How the Word is Passed*, 6.

considerably with time⁴¹ (Figure 2). To protect those that remain, it is beneficial to understand the range of site conditions the cemeteries exist within. Ultimately, each cemetery exists within the larger network. To understand the narrative of one cemetery is wholly incomplete. By examining a range of sites, we can recognize that while access to descendant communities is at the heart of the goal, there is no singular encompassing design solution that is appropriate for every cemetery. Each works better together as a network than a piecemeal of separate protected spaces.

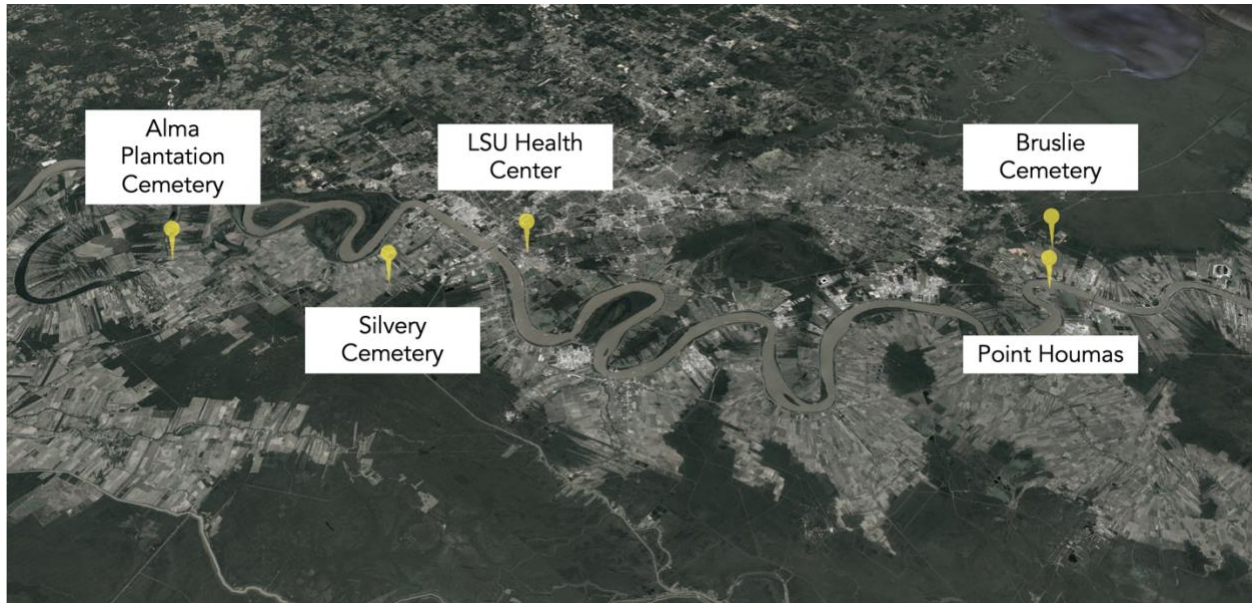


Figure 5. Cemetery Case Study Sites. Base map courtesy of Google Earth.

⁴¹ Forensic Architecture, “Environmental Racism in Death Alley, Louisiana,” July 4, 2021, London, UK.

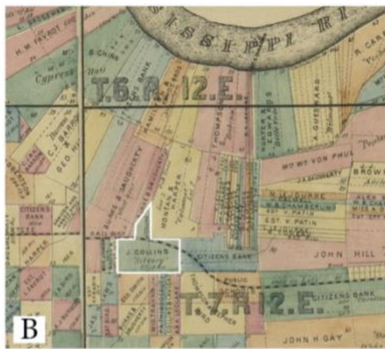
Alma Plantation Cemetery

Silvery Cemetery

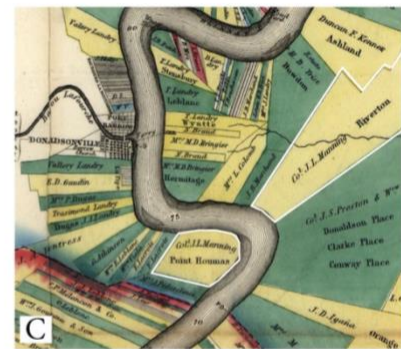
Point Houmas Cemetery



1858



1883



1858



Local Context



Plan View of Cemeteries

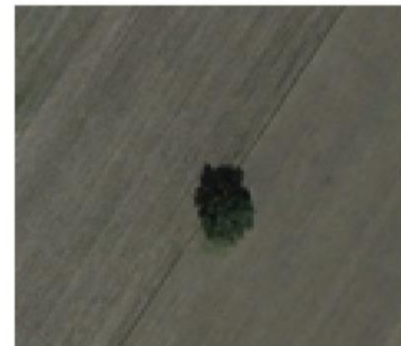
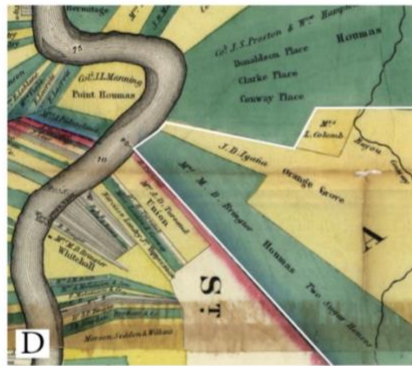


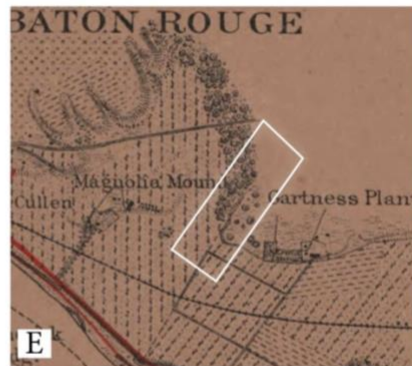
Figure 6. Map and satellite imagery of the cemetery case study sites. These three cemeteries have trees and shrubs that demarcate the location. *Source* [A], [C]: Persac, Marie Adrien, Benjamin Moore Norman, and J.H. Colton & Co, *Norman's chart of the lower Mississippi River*, New Orleans: B. M. Norman, 1858. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/78692178/>. *Source* [B]: Dickinson, C. H. *Map of the parishes of Iberville most of West Baton Rouge and including parts of the parishes of St. Martins, Ascension, and Pointe Coupee, Louisiana: accurately compiled from latest and most authentic United States surveys.* (1883). Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011588002/>.

Bruslie Cemetery

LSU Health Center



1858



1884



Local Context



Plan View of Cemeteries

Figure 7. Map and satellite imagery of the cemetery case study sites. These two cemeteries have lost any original site markers through agricultural and institutional land development. *Source [D]:* Persac, Marie Adrien, Benjamin Moore Norman, and J.H. Colton & Co, *Norman's chart of the lower Mississippi River*, New Orleans: B. M. Norman, 1858. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/78692178/>. *Source [E]:* Molitor, Edward. 1884-1907. "Mississippi River, Sheet # 25". Mississippi River Commission. Map. Louisiana State Museum Historical Maps Collection.

Bruslie Cemetery, Shell Refinery Site, Ascension Parish

At the Shell petrochemical refinery in Convent, LA, the Shell corporation uncovered remains on a plot of their property in 2013 (Figure 9.D). This plot, named Bruslie Cemetery after the former plantation owner, holds approximately 1,000 formerly enslaved people.⁴² Along the backside of the property, away from the river, the agricultural area is settled among the petrochemical equipment, pits, and agricultural fields. With the collective work of the Shell Oil Company, contracted archeologists, and the River Road African American Museum, the cemetery has been preserved as of 2018. In their effort to preserve the space, the Shell corporation cordoned off the patch of land while providing little to no site access or amenities. Though this is an incredible partnership between community organizers and corporations in the area, there is much to be learned from this example. In order to use ground penetrating radar to observe the bodies buried, the topsoil was removed, further scarring the earth and extricating it from former connections to bayou environments.

Though the cemetery land had previously been plowed over for crops, the area is bound on either side by drainage ways. Showing the area's connection to former waterways. To delineate space, the Shell Corporation blocked off the area with bollards on the surrounding edges. A single iron bench is placed on the poured concrete pad that dots the corner of the sites. (Figure 10) Though the bench sought to offer a place to "sit, reflect, and pay their respects",⁴³ the landscape lacks the intimacy of an environment that fosters reflection. Additionally, though almost visible from LA-70 E, the access road to this cemetery is marked with "No Trespassing" signs and a gate. The Shell Oil Company has agreed to a single day per year visitation rights for descendent communities hosted by the River Road African American Museum. On this day representatives of the River Road Museum can organize a ceremony.⁴⁴ The cemetery is otherwise inaccessible to the public. A historic marker now stands in the otherwise isolated patch of desolate land.

⁴² Jones, "Graves of 1,000 Enslaved people," 2021.

⁴³ Jones, "Graves of 1,000 Enslaved people," 2021.

⁴⁴ Jones, "Graves of 1,000 Enslaved people," 2021.

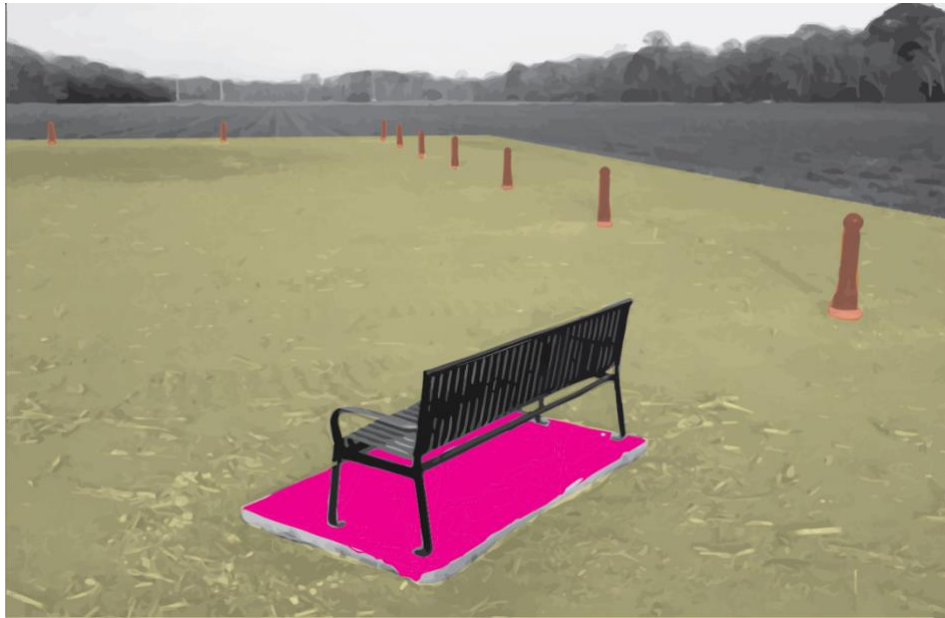


Figure 8. Bruslie Cemetery diagram. The burial grounds (yellow) are devoid of life. The single bench is the only place to rest and reflect.

The Student Health Center, Louisiana State University

Lands from the former Gartness Plantation, the M. Williams Plantation, and the C. Gourier Plantation were purchased by Louisiana State University in 1918 to expand the LSU campus (Figure 9, E).⁴⁵ In 1938 when the Student Health Center was under construction, workers discovered human remains.⁴⁶ Geography professor Andrew Sluyter of LSU argues that surveyors had documented the cemetery of the enslaved in their 1921 survey of the campus (Figure 11).⁴⁷ Given that the families who owned the plantations that became LSU have documented formal burial grounds, Sluyter believes that the remains found were likely of those of the formerly enslaved and their descendants. Little further has been recorded about the cemetery location, the number of graves that were discovered, or the course of action taken upon discovery.⁴⁸ Now the former cemetery location is an active area on LSU campus, no acknowledgment of the burial ground is available. Though unknown, there potentially still can be remains below the buildings. The erasure of the cemetery grounds from the campus, coupled with the ease at which

⁴⁵ "History of LSU," Hill Memorial Library, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/archives/historical-information>

⁴⁶ Nick Ferwin, "LSU professor says Student Health Center built atop plantation cemetery," *LSU Reveille*, July 31, 2021. https://www.lsureveille.com/news/lsu-professor-says-student-health-center-built-atop-plantation-cemetery/article_c8236728-f24f-11eb-beec-4fd47f92987e.html

⁴⁷ Ferwin, "Student Health Center."

⁴⁸ Ferwin, "Student Health Center."

information about the was buried, highlights how simple it was and still is for institutions to simply build over the burial grounds with little to no repercussions. Land that was devalued during the Antebellum was transformed into profitable development property without thought for the importance of the cemetery as a cultural site. Systems of erasure are embedded in our lack of acknowledgment of slavery, often making it difficult to know when something has been covered up long ago. With limited records, it is now nearly impossible to gain further clarity on who was buried there.

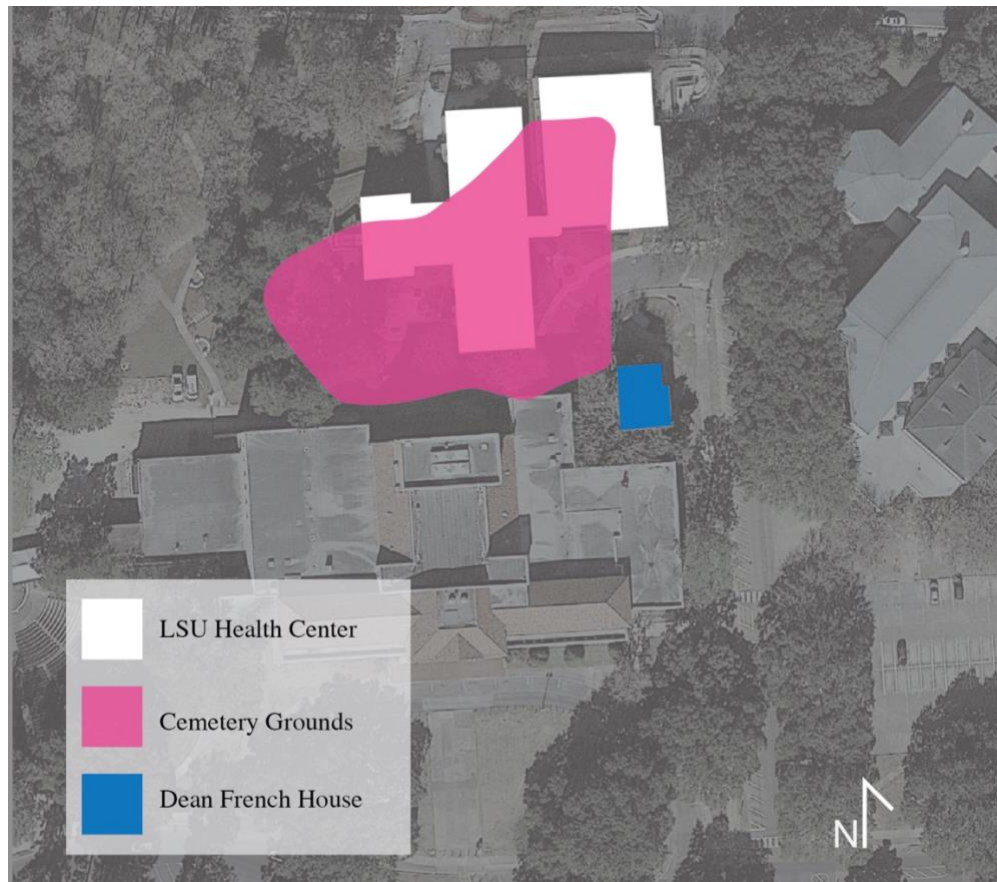


Figure 9. Diagram showing the proposed location of the cemetery in relationship to the Student Health Center at LSU.



Figure 10. The Dean French House (left, and LSU Health Center (Right). *Source:* Google Street View by Google Maps.

Alma Plantation Cemetery, Lakeland, LA

Alma Plantation remains an active sugar cane production and manufacturing plant today. The cemetery is visible from satellite imagery, by a series of above ground burial markers. The physical markers began with burials in 1905. The most recent marker is from 2019, although, accounts suggest up to 60% of the burials here are unmarked, dating back to the mid 1800s.⁴⁹ These are thought to be in the vault-less patch grown over with purple lilies and wildflowers. (Figure 13). There are some marked below ground burials including “wooden crosses, metal placards, pieces of glass, and inscriptions in concrete.”⁵⁰ Burials line the waterway, as close as three feet from the water’s edge. In 2018, the Westside Cemetery Preservation Association worked in partnership with the owner of Alma Plantation to clean up and preserve the cemetery.

Spending a week clearing the grounds and consulting death records, a team of cemetery association members and researchers uncovered records dating back to 1830 of formerly enslaved individuals in the space.⁵¹ The discovery of formal records points to the importance of partnerships to develop trust between property owners and organizations. In turn, creating

⁴⁹ Bridget Thomas, “Historic Rural African American Cemetery Preservation in Southeast Louisiana,” (MA diss., Rutgers University, 2019), 37.

⁵⁰ Thomas, “Historic Rural,” 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 38.

investment by the property owner into the keeping of the sacred cemeteries, humanizing the past with touchstones to the present. With burials as recent as 2019, the cemetery still holds burials for descendant communities and familial lines.⁵² Yet, in order to visit loved ones, those with family buried there are dependent on permissions from the property owner. Permissions are given and rescinded at the will of the time of year and production phase of the sugar manufacturing process. Further, in order to access the site, one must travel by the plant manufacturing facilities and through the fields. Visiting the cemetery becomes emotionally and physically taxing. Still families persist, as the importance of burial in the same space as their kin outweighs the challenges to access the burial ground.



Figure 11. Aerial image of Alma Plantation Cemetery. The yellow boundaries outline areas of above ground burials that occurred post-emancipation. The pink filled area is where researchers believe the below ground burials took place during slavery. Satellite Imagery from Google Earth.

⁵² Thomas, “Historic Rural,” 38.

Silvery Cemetery, Port Allen, LA

Silvery Cemetery is located on the former Collins Plantation land.⁵³ The land is an active agriculture field and bound by single family residential homes to the south and east (Figure X). Silvery Cemetery is unique in that it is referenced on digital mapping services. One can type “Silvery Cemetery” into a map service such as Google Maps and directions are granted. Additionally, the name Silvery suggests a transfer of ownership of the site, as most other cemeteries of the formerly enslaved are named after the former plantation owner, this one is not. While there is no signage showing the cemetery’s location, there are also no “no trespassing” signs. In order to know the place was a cemetery, one would have to have previous knowledge of the site. There is a dirt driveway leading to the patch of trees that surrounds the cemetery (Figure 14). It is unclear whether the drive is an invitation to the public to visit, or a coincidence where farm roads happen to meet the cemetery.



Figure 12. Image of Silvery Cemetery from Silvery Rd. The trees are unassuming amongst the fields. There is no signage to accompany the cemetery.

⁵³ C. H. Dickinson, *Map of the parishes of Iberville most of West Baton Rouge and including parts of the parishes of St. Martins, Ascension, and Pointe Coupee, Louisiana: accurately compiled from latest and most authentic United States surveys*, (1883), Map, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011588002/>.

In mapping existing waterways (Figure 15) the cemetery appears to align with natural drainage and historic waterflow. As the fields were developed to allow for larger agricultural area, the swamp became a constructed drainage canal. Though disconnected now, it holds pieces of the original site context. The mass of overgrown underbrush obscures the space created by the canopy of trees, weaving over raised burial tombs in varying states of disrepair. Open and cracked vaults reveal calcified bones. Name plates have been eroded, further erasing the identities of those buried within.

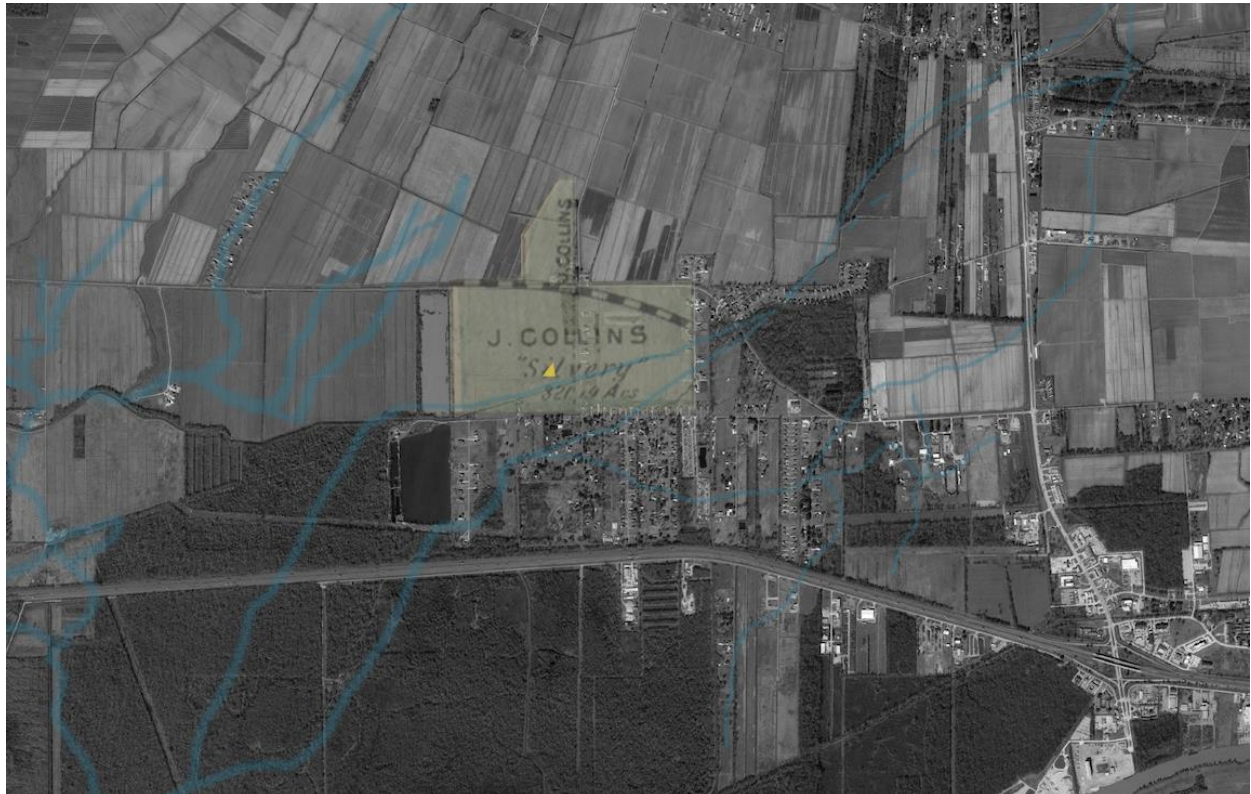


Figure 13. Collage Map showing the location of silvery cemetery in comparison to waterways and flow patterns. The cemetery sits along a bayou waterway that is now a constructed drainage canal. *Data Set:* Harmon, Brendan. “Louisiana Dataset for GRASS GIS”. Zenodo, August 3, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3359620>

Point Houmas, Ascension Parish, LA

Point Houmas is located along the bend of Mississippi River to the east of Donaldsonville, Louisiana (Figure 8 C). The suspected cemetery at Point Houmas has yet to be confirmed by archeological research. Historic maps and Forensic Architecture's work supports the assertion that the space is a cemetery of the formerly enslaved.⁵⁴ The cemetery on this land is protected by a single old live oak. Contrasting the fields and petrochemical towers in the distance, the tree is an island among the encircling sugar cane fronds. While other cemeteries are tucked away on the back edges of plantation properties away from the river, this site breaks the pattern. This can be traced to the former plantation ownership. According to the Norman's Chart of the Lower Mississippi, published in 1856, Col. John L Manning owned both the Point Houmas property as well as the long lot across the river.⁵⁵ The long lot he owned across the river is where the "big house" was. In turn, the whole Point Houmas lot became a parcel for agriculture without having larger infrastructure for the wealthy white landowners. Therefore, the Point Houmas property did not follow the same land patterns as other plantations with the big house along the river edge.



Figure 14. Image of the Point Houmas Cemetery from the sugar cane fields.

⁵⁴ Forensic Architecture, "Environmental Racism," 57-65.

⁵⁵ Persac, Marie Adrien, Benjamin Moore Norman, and J.H. Colton & Co, *Norman's chart of the lower Mississippi River*, New Orleans: B. M. Norman, 1858. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/78692178/>.

That big house is now known as The Houmas House and is well regarded for its Classical Revival architectural style⁵⁶. The Houmas House and gardens are now lauded as USA Today's top historic tourist attraction in Louisiana. The property boasts seven bars and restaurants, a gift shop, and hosts exclusive weddings and corporate events. On their website, only one line in their history section references the more than 550 enslaved people who were forced to labor throughout the properties⁵⁷. Instead, they have an entire section devoted to the ghost stories of the property⁵⁸. The stark contrast between the Point Houmas cemetery protected under the single tree and the prominent tourist destination is haunting, showcasing the inequity of whose story is being told when it comes to the truth of plantation life.

The Action

Action is necessary in the form of legal protections for enslaved cemeteries to make significant change. This section outlines the ways local organizations have fought for the cemeteries in their neighborhoods, the existing policy in place for cemeteries in Louisiana, and finally a proposal for land easements. Questions about preservation and chain of care for cemeteries of the formerly enslaved have become a rising topic in both the national and regional dialogues. Both the New York Times and The New Yorker published pieces in 2021 on this subject.^{59,60} Locally, regional Louisiana newspapers have picked up stories of community resistance and care⁶¹. In July of 2020, the environmental justice group RISE St. James, was involved in protesting the expansion of the Formosa Plastics manufacturing plant.⁶² RISE St. James fought not only for cemeteries, but against the rampant environmental racism affecting their community. From poor air quality to contaminated drinking water, the expansion of the manufacturing plant was set to further disenfranchise the residents, affecting their health and well-being.⁶³ RISE St. James has also asked that Formosa investigate the seven sites the group

⁵⁶ Houmas House, "History," Accessed January 20, 2022. <https://houmashouse.com/history/>

⁵⁷ Houmas House, "History."

⁵⁸ Houmas House, "Ghosts," Accessed March 24, 2022. <https://houmashouse.com/ghosts/>

⁵⁹ Jill Lepore, "When Black History is Unearthed, Who Gets to Speak for the Dead?," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/10/04/when-black-history-is-unearthed-who-gets-to-speak-for-the-dead>.

⁶⁰ Alexandra Eaton, Christoph Koettl, Quincy G. Ledbetter, Victoria Simpson, and Aaron Byrd, "Searching for the Lost Graves of Louisiana's Enslaved People," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2021, Video, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000007778616/louisiana-cancer-alley-cemetery-african-americans-video.html>.

⁶¹ Muller, "Formosa Plastics."

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Formosa has denied their culpability in violating emission and water regulations.

believes are burial grounds on the property. Of the two that Formosa acknowledged, the Formosa representatives only claim one has discoverable remains, agreeing to fence the area off.⁶⁴ To be clear, fencing the area does not equate to community access to the area.

Further, as the markers of cemeteries are often imperceptible or marked by a tree or small grove, it is easy for corporations to overlook or negate the importance of a single tree as a random anomaly. There is little to hold corporations or developers accountable for recognizing the subtle signs of a cemetery. Worse, they often stand to gain by ignoring or clearing cemeteries: they can increase production farming land, build new manufacturing complexes, and expand their holdings without acknowledgement of past harm. Reclaiming enslaved cemeteries is inherently about more than returning the land of the dead, it is also about ensuring that developing industry does not continue to harm the health, safety, and wellbeing of Louisiana's Black residents.

If the goal is to reclaim and return the cemetery land, we must then ask who will take care of them, and how we will financially support the efforts. As landscape architects we have a duty to use our knowledge to integrate questions of access, financial and institutional assistance, and thoughtful design strategies. No singular solution can address the intricacies of land ownership, community access, and perpetual care. Traditionally the landscape discipline has focused on historic preservation efforts to protect cemeteries. The methodology of asserting significance or establishing physical integrity for historic preservation is far more difficult when working with cemeteries of the enslaved.

In 1992, the National Park Service published their *National Register Bulletin 41: Guidelines for evaluating and registering cemeteries and burial places*. The bulletin outlines a standard that defines the qualities that make a site worthy of preservation. While it mentions Native American burial grounds as a reputable form of cemetery worth preserving, the guidelines primarily focus on early American settlers, the Rural Cemetery Movement, and Military grave sites.⁶⁵ The National Register of Historic Places merits cemeteries for preservation based on their archeological, architectural (including the landscape discipline), cultural, structural, and historic significance⁶⁶. Further, the proposals require extensive documentation to validate the

⁶⁴ Muller, "Formosa Plastics."

⁶⁵ Potter, Elizabeth Walton, Beth M. Boland, *National Register Bulletin 41: Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*, (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division. 1992) 3-6.

⁶⁶ Potter, Walton, and Boland, *National Register Bulletin 41*, 15.

significance. This validation is an incompatible strategy for cemeteries of the enslaved as little documentation is available, and comprehensive archeological surveys are costly and impractical.

First, National Register particularly focus on architectural, sculptural, or landscape features that make the cemetery unique and a complete site. There is an inherent connection to the level of integrity of the burial site as an object and its value as a historical site.⁶⁷ As burial grounds of the enslaved are often unmarked or not marked in the traditional sense, they do not fit within the category. While there are examples of unmarked burial sites for the Native American and Indigenous communities like mounds or cairns, these examples already fit into a neat landscape typology. The anomaly features that are emerging as indicators of burial grounds of the enslaved are still developing. Second, significant written documentation is needed in the application process that describes the unique historic significance of the site and the people entombed there.

Usually, the focus is on famous individuals, sites of historic events and uprisings, or people who have made recorded contributions to society.⁶⁸ The expectation is that the evidence can be provided in the form of historic documents. But many of the experiences of the enslaved were never written at the moment of their occurrence. While we have the Works Project Administration (WPA), Federal Writers Project Slave Narrative Collection, these were interviews conducted in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁹ Slave schedules produced in the 1800s only include the race and age of the enslaved with the name of the plantation owner. Much of our cannon on slavery exists not as written documentation, but instead of a rich oral history tradition. In turn, historic preservation efforts become exclusionary, devaluing the significance of a population who was systematically erased from written history and white dominant narratives of enslavement.

Third, the effort to complete the paperwork to submit for the National Register of Historic Places is significant. Such energy exceeds the bandwidth of many local organizations. Researching, writing, and compiling the applications are time consuming and both financially and emotionally costly. Finally, the large number of cemeteries of the enslaved throughout Louisiana makes individual preservation applications unfeasible. To focus on applying for each

⁶⁷ Potter, Walton, and Boland, *National Register Bulletin* 41, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 9-11.

⁶⁹ Library of Congress, "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938," April 2001. <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0104/slaves.html>

site as an individual entity is nearly impossible. Instead, there is an opportunity to think of these sites as a network rather than as individual sites. These cemeteries do not exist in isolation, they are a massive system of places that expose the pervasiveness of slavery in the landscape. To accomplish a goal of land reclamation and return to Black and descendant communities, we must look outside of traditional historic preservation methods, and turn to policy to create concrete change.

Alongside the dispersal of National Bulletin 41, in 1992 the Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation act was enacted. In response to threats to unmarked burial sites, the Louisiana government sought to protect them “both from economic development of the land and from persons engaged for personal or financial gain in the mining of prehistoric and historic Indian, pioneer, and Civil War and other soldiers' burial sites”.⁷⁰ Like the Historic Register, the chapter made no mention of the burial ground of enslaved peoples. Though it is unclear if the language surrounding enslaved peoples was intentionally omitted, the preservation act expressly protects farmers and agricultural land. Suggesting the exclusion of enslaved burial sites could have been to protect the agriculture industry. The act specifically remarked that the chapter excludes: “The use of land for purposes of farming, cattle raising, timber growing, and other similar surface uses that will not result in the disturbance of human skeletal remains through excavation or other activities”.⁷¹ Whether intended at the time or not, this absence specifically targets enslaved burial grounds, holding them back from gaining protections. We must acknowledge that often these laws are only enforceable when property owners and stakeholders make the discovery of the cemeteries known. However, if there is a public knowledge of the discovered cemetery the implementation of this statute does provide legal recourse.

In 2010, the “Louisiana Historic Cemetery Preservation Act” was enacted. The legislature asserted that existing state laws do not provide for the adequate protection of historic cemeteries that are not under the jurisdiction of the Louisiana Cemetery Board, are not on state lands, and are not solely comprised of unmarked graves. Cemeteries are considered by most cultures to be sacred spaces.⁷² While this legislation was a step forward, it again is exclusionary to enslaved cemeteries, especially those that were transformed into primarily Black family cemeteries following emancipation. This law does not cover grave sites younger than 50 years, though it is unclear if this is 50 years from the last burial, or the inception of the cemetery. As

⁷⁰ LA Rev Stat § 8:672

⁷¹ LA Rev Stat § 8:674

⁷² LA Rev Stat § 8:932

many of these sites were used well into the late 1900s, many of the cemeteries will only become eligible in the coming years. By then it may be too late.

Finally, in 2018 the Slave Ancestral Burial Grounds Commission was formed. The Commission's goal is to "study and develop measures to preserve and protect unmarked and historic burial grounds, graves, and cemeteries of the formerly enslaved in Louisiana."⁷³ The Preservation Commission asserts that the burial grounds are an important part of the national cultural heritage, and further should be regarded as sacred grounds.⁷⁴ The formation of the commission showcases the awareness that current legislation does not adequately respect and protect enslaved burial grounds. Since the commission's formation, there has been no further amendments that provide specific preservation acts or consequences for the disturbing or desecration of enslaved cemeteries.

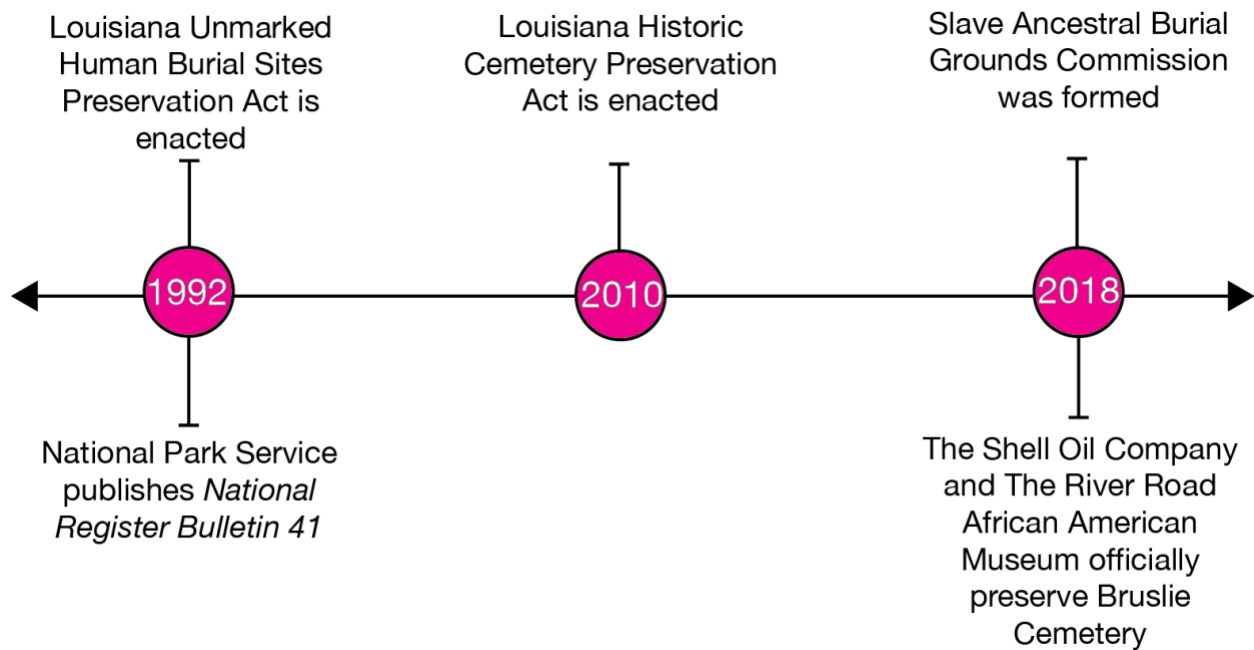


Figure 15. Timeline of legislative acts related to cemeteries in Louisiana.

There is opportunity to develop strong policy moves that work beyond preservation acts and focus on land-based reparations. Landscape architecture should work towards these reparations as supportive to design, both returning the cemetery land and fostering community driven site interventions that meet their collective needs. After all, designing and installing a

⁷³ LA HCR51 "Slave Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission"

⁷⁴ LA HCR51 "Slave Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission"

functional pathway is useless without lawful access to the cemetery lands. Having been excluded and ignored, it is time to make bold legislation that returns cemetery land to Black and descendant communities and their organizations. The time and effort to pass such legislation requires determined and passionate legislators who are willing to take a stand. It also relies on landowners and other stakeholders to release their land claims, which is inherently challenging. As an intermediate stage, I propose a land easement model, which can be used to bring together property owners, corporations, stakeholders, and descendant community representatives. As defined by US Legal: “a land easement is an easement that gives a person, creature, or thing the right to tread upon or encroach upon land that is owned by someone else.”⁷⁵ By building trust between all stakeholders, we can destigmatize the ability to access a private property in a safe and respectful way. The use of a land easement in this case would allow for Black and descendant community members to safely access the cemeteries for means of bereavement, contemplation, grave and ground care, ritual, and celebration. They would not be subjected to legal recourse or harassment for entering the property. As it stands, the cemeteries are currently islands, marooned among a sea of agriculture, they deserve to be enlivened by the connections to today’s residents.

Land Trust Alliance Precedent

Incentivizing landowners to donate their agricultural land to a conservation easement will pose a significant challenge. With the proper financial resources and educational support however, they may be convinced to donate their land. Federal tax incentives will act as the primary financial driver. In 2015 Congress changed their federal tax incentives for conservation easement donations to be more robust in the favor of landowners, especially farmers and ranchers. A farmer or rancher is defined as someone who will receive “more than 50% of their gross income from ‘the trade or business of farming.’”⁷⁶ As many of the cemeteries remain on active agricultural land, many of the landowners may fall within this category. As part of the conservation easement terms, many landowners can reserve the right to continue to grow crops on the parcel while upholding agreements to not further develop the cemetery land with

⁷⁵ US Legal. “Land Easement Law and Legal Definition”. Accessed March 4, 2022.
<https://definitions.uslegal.com/land-easement/#:~:text=Land%20Easement%20Law%20and%20Legal%20Definition%20A%20land,upon%20land%20that%20is%20owned%20by%20someone%20else.>

⁷⁶ “Income Tax Incentives for Land Conservation,” Land Trust Alliance, accessed March 22, 2022.
<https://www.landtrustalliance.org/topics/taxes/income-tax-incentives-land-conservation>

additional structures.⁷⁷ A land trust would be required to ensure landowners adhere to the conservation easements.

With the 2015 revisions for federal tax incentives, the farmers or ranchers could be eligible for 100% tax return on the value of the land they donate. The return would not only be for the first year when the donation occurred, but for each additional 15 years following.⁷⁸ As of 2020 Acretrader asserts that an acre of agricultural land in Louisiana was valued at \$2,930.⁷⁹ Based on area estimations through Google Earth of the Point Houmas property, the current owner has approximately 825 acres of land for agriculture. A donation of 6 acres including the enslaved cemetery to a land trust would allow for a clear access area from the road to the cemetery. Those 6 acres are less than 1% of the total acreage of the property. Assuming the value of the land was \$2,930 per acre, the landowner would receive \$17,580 in tax incentives the first year. In total, they would receive \$281,280 worth of tax incentive over the course of the 16-year period. While each cemetery is different, conservation easements could be paired with agreements for safe passage to the sites without donating additional lands. With the assistance of advisors on conservation land easement laws, this system could be a feasible way to convince landowners to donate land without losing significant income, especially where agreements are reached for landowners to continue to their crops.

Summary. Overall, the cemetery sites deserve to be acknowledged in our historical narratives and policy decisions moving forward. In understanding the relationships between the cemeteries, waterways, agriculture, and industrial expansion, we recognize the erasure of both the sites and the people who are interred within them. Formerly enslaved people are responsible for many of the cultural and capital labor we still gain from today. Their contributions are not an echo of the past, systems of enslavement built into the American fabric continue to harm Black communities. To better recognize and honor the formerly enslaved and their descendants the cemetery landscape should be enlivened. First, they must be returned to descendant communities. Second, the cemeteries, the enslaved, and their respective stories should be brought into public memory and narratives. To accomplish this, we must first develop a framework that supports these endeavors. Through educating the Louisiana public, stakeholders, and ourselves

⁷⁷ Land Trust Alliance, “Income Tax Incentives for Land Conservation.”

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “Louisiana Agriculture Overview – Louisiana Farmland Prices,” Acretrader, accessed March 22, 2022. <https://www.acretrader.com/resources/louisiana-farmland-prices>

we can better recognize the necessity for continued research and development of cemetery preservation and memorial design.

CHAPTER 3. EDUCATION

The following section outlines the structure of an educational Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes. It begins by arguing the reparative necessity for a new collaborative research and preservation center. Next it explores the functional aspects of the center, including the institutions engaged with the center, research and preservation goals, and cross-disciplinary support, and organizational structure. Lastly, the section investigates the cultural significance of the funeral ceremony in enslaved life, framing the necessity for an educational and experiential cemetery exhibition connected to the center.

The cemeteries of the formerly enslaved are facing significant dangers. Working land easements into a system of landscape interventions begins to enact means of access and protection. However, developing and enforcing land easements relies on trust between community organizers and landowners. To create a system that provides access for Black and descendant communities to the cemeteries in perpetuity, foundational support networks must be formed. To create the support structure, I propose a Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes. The focus of the center is on: (1) building trust between stakeholders, landowners, and community leaders and members, (2) providing institutional resources that advance access to cemeteries and protection from unwanted development, (3) exhibiting educational materials that explore the cultural importance of the cemeteries of the enslaved and foster an experiential power of place.

An educational institution like Louisiana State University or Southern University, can provide resources such as faculty, graduate assistants, archives, and skills and knowledge that are supportive of access to and acknowledgement of cemeteries. Interdisciplinary interaction in the center cultivates richer perspectives and problem solving. Documentation of locations, regular maintenance, and historical research is necessary to create a concrete database of where the existing cemeteries remain. Forensic Architecture's cemetery anomaly mapping work was the catalyst for understanding the density of cemeteries in the landscape, however, their mapping work was primarily digital without in person archeological confirmation.⁸⁰ This thesis does not advocate for invasive archeological tests to confirm every location, however, a confirmation like an exploratory shovel test or ground-penetrating radar may be necessary to show concrete evidence of burial grounds. To continue from Forensic Architecture's mapping work within

⁸⁰ Forensic Architecture, "Environmental Racism," (65-68).

Louisiana would take significant labor and time that extends beyond the community-led capacity and bandwidth. But, by producing records that are accessible to the public, a paper trail can begin to emerge, holding landowners and corporations accountable. Through defining perceptible traits and markers, and sharing that information with the public, the cemeteries become more noticeable when they disappear.

Research, fundraising, and advocacy is only half of the work. Part of the challenge is to engage people who may have something to gain from the destruction or abandonment of the cemeteries. There are both structural systems and human perspectives that advance inequity. Though it is difficult to unlearn the racist practices in ourselves, our communities, and our institutions, having access to resources that shift perspectives aids in unlearning practices. When reflecting on the ways that we remember and narrate our nation's history of slavery in her book *Trace*, Lauret Edith Savoy writes: "How a society remembers can't be separated from how it wants to be remembered or from what it wishes it was- that is, if we believe stories of ancestors reflect who we are and how we came to be. The past is remembered and told by desire".⁸¹ Our contemporary narratives that mis-represent the oppression and violence of slavery⁸² reflect an unwillingness to reconcile with harm that was and still is caused today. By reframing the dominant narratives on plantation landscapes to center on the formerly enslaved, multi-disciplinary practitioners and professionals who engage with the landscape can assert their commitment to changing the way these landscapes are remembered. Overall, people deserve to feel represented within the landscape and in the larger dialogue between history and place.

Further, combatting the erasure of formerly enslaved people from the landscape is imperative. The placement of the education center on the LSU campus seeks to respond to the institution's removal of connections to the plantation systems. Ties to structures of slavery, racism, and segregation have been silenced over time from the visual and social landscape of LSU. The campus was forged of racism, the impetus to desegregate LSU in the 1950s was not out of efforts for equality, instead out of the interest in being a law-abiding institution.⁸³ LSU has continued to struggle with discriminatory admissions processes, attrition issues, and failures to

⁸¹ Lauret E. Savoy, *Trace: memory, history, race, and the American landscape* (Berkeley, California: Counterpoint Press, 2015), 108.

⁸² Savoy, *Trace*, 92.

⁸³ Caden Lim, "Never before seen letters show glimpse into Middleton's fight for segregation at LSU," *LSU Reveille*, July 18, 2021, https://www.lsureveille.com/news/never-before-seen-letters-show-glimpse-into-middletons-fight-for-segregation-at-lsu/article_46dfbb7a-c684-11eb-bd9e-6f3dcb60d26c.html

foster hiring practices that create a more diverse faculty and staff.⁸⁴ This has led to multiple agreements between LSU and the federal government to rectify their discriminatory practices, that were ultimately deemed ineffective in 1989.⁸⁵

Though challenging, to create the Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes on LSU soil would be a bold act of reparations in Louisiana. Especially under the assertion that LSU would not hold the power of the institution, instead, it hosts the center as a singular research and preservation entity. To take on the supportive infrastructure of this labor is an active step at reshaping the campus culture and commitment to reconciling the campus' plantation legacy. Importantly, the center would join resources of LSU, Southern University, the River Road African American Museum, and other entities in the area. The siting of the center relates directly to the elimination of the historic cemetery for building Louisiana State University Health Center (Figure 11) Next to the health center, the Dean French House currently stands empty. This empty building near the edge of campus would provide easy access to both students, faculty, researchers, and most importantly community members. As it is outside of the formal parking gates, visitors have access even during regular campus hours. Like the network of cemeteries of the formerly enslaved, this center should not stand alone. Having additional research and development hubs at the neighboring institutions of Southern and the River Road African American Museum would continue to develop cross-institutional information sharing.

The Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes

The Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscape's primary objective is to develop trust between stakeholders, landowners, educational institutions, and community leaders and members. This will be achieved in a twofold process: (1) through providing a research and policy arm that continues to advance the conservation of and access to the cemetery sites, and (2) an educational exhibition that explores the cultural importance of burial practice, ritual, and cemetery spaces. The situating of the center away from the physical cemetery sites allows for Black and descendant community leaders to determine who has access to the burial spaces. While descendant community organizers are supported by the resources of

⁸⁴ Joshua Jordan, "Guest Opinion: Legacy of segregation era lives on today at LSU." *LSU Reveille*, July 30, 2021. https://www.lsureveille.com/opinion/guest-opinion-legacy-of-segregation-era-lives-on-today-at-lsu/article_1ac67a42-f160-11eb-880e-7b3d6c8a55c9.html

⁸⁵ Jordan, "Guest Opinion."

the research arm, they are the primary sentinel of the burial sites. In turn, they ultimately decide to what end others outside of their community can gain access.

Research and Policy

Beginning with the research and policy arm, the center will further research and development of resources that support the cemeteries. The center allows for the collaboration across disciplines at Southern and LSU like Law, Geography, Anthropology, Landscape Architecture, African and African American Studies, Ecology, Art, and more. By engaging the diversity of perspectives among the faculty, students, and researchers, the breadth of ideas will better respond to the needs of the land and community. The vast knowledge available plays to different discipline's strengths. Allowing different leaders to focus when intensive policy needs to be written, archival research compilation is necessary, when applying for available grants, and for overall furthering the field.

The practice of Landscape architecture benefits from collaboration of adjacent professions. The Coastal Sustainability Studio serves as a successful precedent for a research institution partnered with LSU. "Through trans-disciplinary design, research, community engagement, and education, the CSS uses innovative approaches to design and to foster resilient coastal communities and ecosystems."⁸⁶ Working with community partners they foster connections between local authorities and community members while engaging the talents of outside experts.⁸⁷ Lastly, the center could host the land trust necessary to create land easements for cemeteries. The land trust coupled with the cemetery landscape center would work towards building trust and relationships between landowners and community members. Offering resources to both those interested in donating land as well as those advocating for lands yet to be returned.

The proposed center will contain meeting and gathering space that is reserved as classrooms, community space, and a research office. The center can also host workshops, listening sessions, and more. With the help of a few full-time employees as the cornerstone of the operation, outside collaborators and innovators would develop a full team. Their duties would include grant writing for both financial support of the center, as well as for conservation efforts of the cemeteries. They would work in partnership with research librarians at Hill Memorial

⁸⁶ "CSS Concept," Coastal Sustainability Studio, accessed March 24, 2022.

⁸⁷ Coastal Sustainability Studio, "CSS Concept."

Library (LSU) and the John B. Cade Library (Southern) to offer genealogical and historic research in relation to the plantations of the region. Developing new systems for preservation and conservation would allow for creative iterations to emerge for new ways to aid the descendant communities and their ancestral cemeteries. The center is a collaborative space that could transform the ways we interact as landscape architects to our communities: nourishing networks of support, research, and policy.

Exhibition and Cultural Significance

The visual exhibition is crucial in educating the Louisiana public on the importance of the cemetery as a cultural asset and space for bereavement. The gallery will include exhibitions that describe the history and ritual of burial practices by enslaved peoples, illuminating the challenges the cemeteries face in the contemporary landscape, and providing an experiential installation that engages the senses. The sanctity of the cemetery cannot be overstated, but it is difficult to understand without engaging with the canopy and environment created by the vegetation. Yet, it is not appropriate to intrude upon the sacred aspects of the site as a tourist attraction. Having a physically interactive exhibition allows people to engage their senses with landscape features and form a connection to place without trampling the cemeteries. Further, burial grounds hold their sanctity through the ceremony associated with them. By combining the historical land context, the funerary rites, and the experiential landscape, a more holistic exhibit can be developed.

An understanding of the process of the funeral is inherently important in demarcating that these cemetery spaces were and still are sacred spaces. They are historic spaces of community gathering that included the sharing of space, song, and stories. As many original plantation landscapes have been changed over time, the narratives of slavery have been removed along with them. The plantations have crumbled and the land parceled into smaller farms and residential developments. Along with it, we have allowed ourselves to forget. Edward Clough eloquently states: “The value of the post plantation environment lies in its ability to slowly dissolve the plantation’s traces of white order, yet the result is often to indiscriminately remove all traces, committing plantation history – white and black – to oblivion.”⁸⁸ Today, only the disconnected tree or grove of trees remains to protect the burial grounds of the formerly enslaved. Like the

⁸⁸ Edward Clough, “In Search of Sunken Graves: Between Postslavery and Postplantation in Charles Chesnutt’s Fiction,” *Southern Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Fall 2015): 91.

removal from the context of a larger bayou or swamp, the sites have been extricated from the ritual performances that occurred there.

The funerary ceremony was an important aspect of the enslaved individuals' social and religious life. As Jamieson writes in "Material Culture and Social Death: African American Burial Practices": "Funerals may have been one of the few times the Antebellum slave communities could assume control over the symbolism around them, and thus create the dignity at death that negated the "social death" of their slave status."⁸⁹ Moments of autonomy were powerful, especially in the Antebellum South. During slavery, whites would use their power to eliminate common cultural identities between enslaved people. They aimed to keep the enslaved from uniting and rebelling under a common experience of oppression.⁹⁰ Besides specific white oppression that limited the passing of African communal knowledge, the age and gender of those who were stolen from Africa affected strength of the religious and ancestral ties they had.⁹¹ As is true in many cultures, individuals of varying age and social standing may be privy to different aspects of cultural and religious practices. Over generations, the original African traditions morphed and were distilled into a hybrid of beliefs and practices. Thus, the religious framework and narratives that arise in sources available today may only be described as an interwoven system of beliefs across a variety of cultures.⁹² The conglomeration of distinct belief systems was forcibly distilled into a single "African American" identity. It is important to note that the following religious perceptions of death and the soul are curated sets of beliefs based on the known testimonies and religious allegories. They do not represent the entirety of enslaved individuals.

Besides the importance of community gathering that the funeral provided, the ceremonies also served a religious purpose. Burial rites ensured the deceased's soul passed on to the spirit world and did not become trapped on earth as a ghost. This was done for care of not only the dead, but also the living. The lack of a proper burial can lead to becoming haunted by the dead.⁹³ One consistent religious theme that is noted across many narratives is the importance of the Ancestors. The spirits of ancestors can intervene in the lives of the living and therefore must be

⁸⁹ Ross W. Jamieson, "Material Culture and Social Death: African-American Burial Practices," *Historical Archaeology* 29, no. 4 (1995): 55.

⁹⁰ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 89.

⁹¹ Jamieson, "Material Culture and Social Death," 47.

⁹² Smith, *How the Word is Passed*, 53-55.

⁹³ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 13.

honored and respected.⁹⁴ Elders were described as “mediators between the ancestors and kin groups.”⁹⁵ Further, the funeral was used to pass the deceased from the living realm into the realm of the ancestors. If the rites were not carried out, the deceased would be left to roam the living world ambiguously without ties to the spirit world.⁹⁶ In “The Religion of the Slaves” by Olli Alho, he studied nearly 500 spirituals and determined that death was generally seen as a liberating experience.⁹⁷ Another repeated theme in the spirituals was the premise of rebirth. Upon death one would return to Africa and be reborn among their ancestral kin. They might even be reborn as the next child in their family.⁹⁸ The cyclic nature of life and death provided solace in knowing one would be reunited with their relatives upon their death.

Summary. The educational Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes serves as a new precedent for a cultural institution. Through collaboration between universities, researchers, local organizations, and community members, the center can support political change that benefits the cemeteries and descendant communities. The center provides critical labor that often burdens smaller local organizers, allowing them to focus on placemaking at their cemeteries without legal repercussions. Further it fosters empathy and understanding through an educational exhibition that explores the cultural significance of burial sites. By containing the exhibition within the center, it provides a boundary that allows community members to maintain the authority surrounding who can access the specific burial sites. As landscape architects we have the duty and honor to design in a manner that reflects the memory of the sites. Finally, principles of memorial landscapes will inform richer connection between history, narrative, site, and bereavement, to create landscape design interventions.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

⁹⁵ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 54.

⁹⁶ Jamieson, “Material Culture and Social Death,” 51.

⁹⁷ Alho, “The Religion of the Slaves,” 93.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 93.

CHAPTER 4. MEMORY

Memory section focuses the primary designed spaces of the thesis. The first is the educational exhibition at The Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes. By first exploring the narratives of burial and funerary traditions of the formerly enslaved, an exhibition canon was developed. In addition, the funeral rituals inspire the physical and experiential qualities of the two memorial designs within the landscape. The first memorial design focuses on providing safe access to Black and descendant communities. The second creates a network of landscape installations that brings the enslaved cemetery into public canon.

The Funeral

This section focuses on the particulars of the enslaved funerary and cemetery traditions. The funeral narrative will inform the design decisions of the center's exhibition, the community design component, and the memorial network design. It is significant to note that not everyone was afforded a proper burial. Some people were callously disposed of by the hands of landowners, overseers, patrols, and others.⁹⁹ Understanding the nature of the funeral brings context to the importance of the burial sites for not only historic significance but also the emotional experience and cultural contexts of the cemeteries. In the absence of records of who was buried there, we can instead look towards their traditions. In turn, honoring them through an acknowledgement for and respect of their religious and spiritual practices. The funerary ceremonies also inspire design themes, material qualities, and forms that will inspire site specific design installations. By linking the installations to burial rituals, they relink the bereavement context back to the cemeteries.

The Preparation of the Body: Upon the death of the enslaved individual, preparation of the body began after the working hours. Typically, elder women were tasked with the “setting up” process. While they were getting the physical body ready for burial, their job was also one of a spiritual nature. They kept the spirit company, often by singing or prayer.¹⁰⁰ Also sometimes noted as “fixing the corpse,” in some cases pennies were placed over the eyes to keep them from opening. In addition, the stomach was salted in order to protect the living against the haunting of

⁹⁹ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 59.

¹⁰⁰ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 51-54

the dead's soul.¹⁰¹ If the body could not be buried that night, it was laid on a cooling board to prevent decay. Mourners would watch the body overnight. These overnight observances allowed for stories and songs to be shared amongst the enslaved individuals with little oversight from the master or overseer.¹⁰² Preparation of the body allowed for the passing of cultural heritage between the enslaved people over generations.

The Wake: In some areas, the death was announced by drums, alerting neighboring plantations of the upcoming gathering for the wake.¹⁰³ Accounts from Virginia, however, suggest that some relatives were notified by enslaved individuals who held passes that provided permission to travel and leave the plantation. Unauthorized travel was also used to alert others. The gathering for the funeral provided a unique opportunity for enslaved family and friends who had been separated on different plantations to gather.¹⁰⁴ During the wake, the head of the household of the deceased and the family would march around the body in order of seniority, passing the youngest child around or under the deceased. The process signified the breaking of the cycle of death, protecting the living relatives.¹⁰⁵

The overall goal of the funerary process was to change the community in which the soul resided, transitioning the soul from the plane of the living to the realm of the ancestors.¹⁰⁶ During the wake, the soul was still thought to be with the living. The attendants of the wake would speak to the deceased, asking them to carry messages to their ancestors and departed family and friends. In addition to messages, spirituals would be sung. Food would be served close to midnight, before the precession began.¹⁰⁷

The Precession: The precession often began close to or following midnight. The precession occurred under the light of pine torches that lit the way through the fields and forests on the way to the burial grounds. The nighttime ceremony allowed for the maximum number of attendants to join the procession. Daytime ceremonies were often impossible as the enslaved were not allowed to break from plantation duties.¹⁰⁸ In addition, between 1750 and 1830, laws in the Antebellum South were strengthened to minimize the number of enslaved people who could gather for funerals. Even when enslaved individuals were given formal permission to travel at

¹⁰¹ Alho, "The Religion of the Slaves," 159-160.

¹⁰² Rainville, *Hidden History*, 55.

¹⁰³ Alho, "The Religion of the Slaves," 160.

¹⁰⁴ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 55.

¹⁰⁵ Alho, "The Religion of the Slaves," 160.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 160.

¹⁰⁸ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 57.

night to attend the funeral, many were blatantly accosted by “slave patrols“ who beat the travelers and stopped the gatherings.¹⁰⁹ While many of the preceding events were primarily enslaved-only affairs, the precession and following burial were often attended and overseen by white slaveholders, appointed white preachers, or even on rare occasions the overseer.¹¹⁰ Because of this, there are some narratives of white attendants and their perceptions of the ceremony.

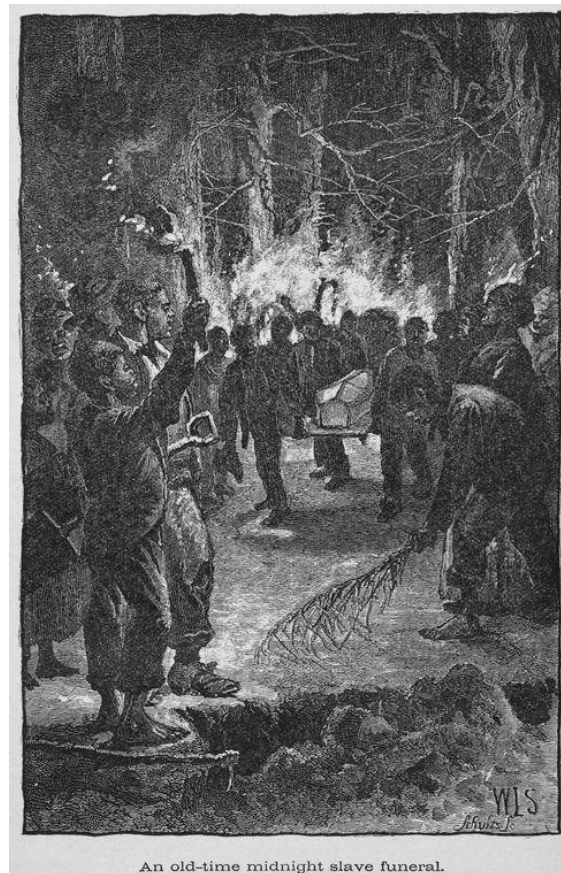


Figure 16: Rare image published showing the funeral with torches alighting the ceremony. Source: Pierson, Hamilton. *Midnight Slave Funeral*, 1881. Original caption “An old- time midnight slave funeral.” From Hamilton Pierson, *In the Brush; or, Old- Time Social, Political, and Religious Life in the Southwest* (New York: D. Appleton, 1991), facing 284.

Singing and spirituals were not limited to the wake, instead they continued throughout the entirety of the funeral procedure. The singing was often accompanied by dancing, clapping, and rhythmic movements. As Rabotaue describes: “The singing style of the slaves, which was

¹⁰⁹ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 59.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 57.

influenced by their African heritage, was characterized by a strong emphasis on call and response, polyrhythms, syncopation, ornamentation, slides from one note to another, and repetition.”¹¹¹ He further goes on to explain the barbarism in which the white observers would describe these displays. Especially, when reading white narratives of African American enslaved individuals, we must carefully remove the white incomprehension of complex artistic expressions of grief and spirituality.

The Committal of the Body and Burial Rites: Upon reaching the burial space, it was customary to ask permission before entering. The body was lowered into the grave and a short prayer was spoken. If there was no formal priest in attendance, often a well-regarded member of the community was asked to speak.¹¹² Bodies were often covered with a white fabric shroud. In some rare cases a simple wooden coffin was constructed. Burials were often underground, with minimal headstones or markings to distinguish them as resources were limited.¹¹³ In some accounts, the singing, shouting, and dancing would continue in a circular motion around the grave.¹¹⁴ The continuation of spirituals and dancing allowed for expressions of grief and the sharing of culture in a space where it could not be understood nor appreciated by white onlookers.

There were two categories of objects that were buried with the deceased or placed on top of the grave: personal effects and objects for the spirit world. The purpose of placing personal sentiments was to tie the soul to the grave. Items such as the last cup that they drank from were broken upon the grave. The breaking of personal goods is a debated topic. While some claim that breaking the items was a way to break the cycle of death within the community,¹¹⁵ others argue that by damaging the object, it limited looting and stealing from gravesites.¹¹⁶ The symbolism of cracked or perforated bowls and cups meant that the soul of the deceased was free to move across worlds.¹¹⁷

These broken objects were not haphazardly placed, the cracked pieces were a symbol of respect rather than of waste. Other objects were buried with the deceased that would help their soul access the afterlife. Money, shells, beads, small carved boats, mirrored surfaces, and other

¹¹¹ Rabotaeu, *Slave Religion*, 74.

¹¹² Alho, “The Religion of the Slaves,” 160.

¹¹³ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 60.

¹¹⁴ Rabotaeu, *Slave Religion*, 72.

¹¹⁵ Jamieson, “Material Culture and Social Death,” 51.

¹¹⁶ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 60.

¹¹⁷ Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, 162.

objects with allusions to water were buried to help the deceased cross the ocean to Africa.¹¹⁸ Finally, food was brought in the precession to place on the grave. The food was to keep the spirit with the grave instead of returning with the group following the burial. Beyond the initial burial of the body, the upkeep of the cemetery was less important.¹¹⁹ Given that the soul was to travel to the spirit world and the assumption that casual visitation to the cemetery grounds was not possible during slavery, the focus of the funerary ceremony is primarily on the process rather than the care of cemetery grounds.

Second Funeral: The second funeral was one for the soul, rather than body. As the body had been ceremoniously buried previously, the second funeral could be held weeks or months after the first, especially if the death had occurred during a peak harvesting season. In many cases this funeral honored multiple deaths that may have occurred across different plantation communities. The focus was on the preacher's sermon rather than mourning the dead.¹²⁰ The length of time in between the burial and second funeral was not only a function of adaptation to plantation life, but also served to help the soul of the departed continue its journey.¹²¹ The second funeral continued to build connection and community between people.

Funeral Landscape Themes

The primary themes that are extrapolated from the burial and funerary rituals are broken into five categories: (1) temporality, (2) narrative, (3) materiality, (4) audio, and (5) movement. These themes work together to form the basis for the design installations of the project.

Temporality is defined by the midnight funeral. As the ceremonies occurred in the evening and overnight, the landscape was traversed in darkness by moonlight and torchlight. *Narratives* of self and culture were passed between family members and enslaved communities during the preparations of the body, during songs, prayer, and funerary ritual. Different *materials* including mirrors, items last held by the deceased, shells, beads, belongings, and fabrics were indicative of burial and funeral proceedings. *Audio* components of song, music, wailing, and complex sounds of bereavement were essential to the grieving processes. *Movements* were primarily broken into two categories: the processional line, and they circular motion of dances, ceremonies, and perceptions of death (Figure 20).

¹¹⁸ Jamieson, *Rituals of Resistance*, 49-51.

¹¹⁹ Alho, "The Religion of the Slaves," 161.

¹²⁰ Alho, "The Religion of the Slaves," 162.

¹²¹ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 52.

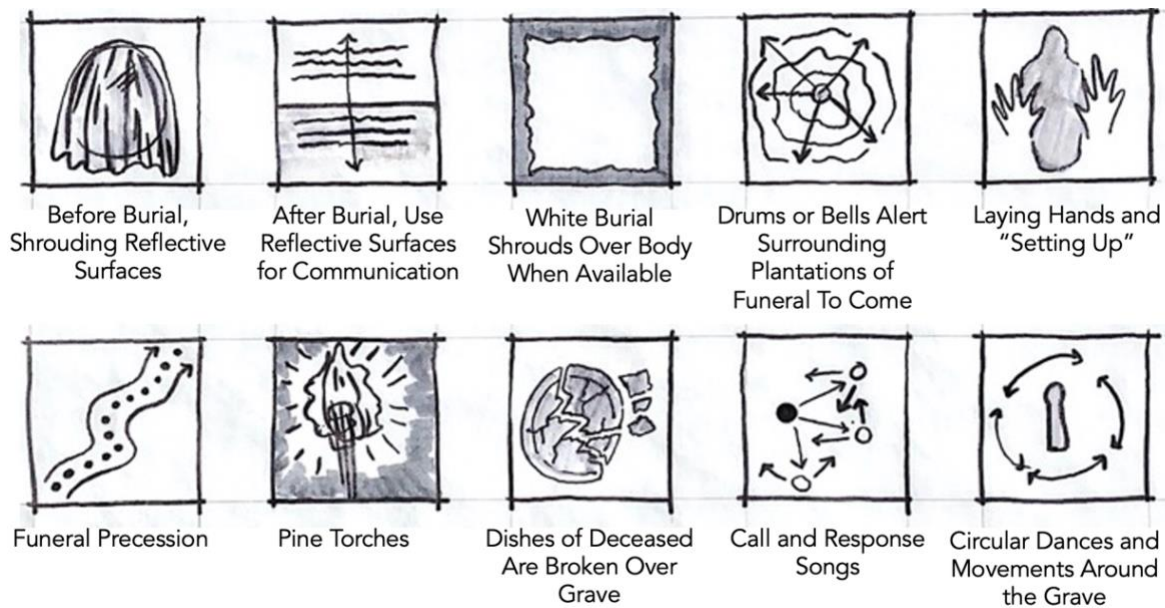


Figure 17. Diagram of the burial practices, visualizing the different aspects of ceremony.

Gallery Exhibition

Traditional museums might display the items and historic objects that have been collected from burial sites. As landscape architects, the challenge is to create an environment in the interior of a gallery that captures the essence of the cemetery. In his text *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*, Young describes the specific Kongolesse burial land as a separated space from the living. "The land of the dead existed elsewhere. The land of the dead is where we are not. As the living live in cities and towns, so the dead inhabit the woods; as the living occupy the land so the dead dwell in the water."¹²² The cemetery space may have been determined by limiting factors of plantation productivity but its power and connection to the people it served extends far into the landscape. The distance between the physical burial ground and the educational gallery is in congruence with the separation between the living and the dead.

In setting the appropriate mood for the exhibition, personal experiences of the cemeteries play a key role. The experiential aspects of the gallery are drawn from the site visit at Point Houmas. A brief personal narrative is as follows:

When driving towards the Point Houmas cemetery tree, trucks filled to the brim with freshly harvested sugar cane passed myself and co-pilot along the highway,

¹²² Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, 148.

covering the road edges with cane fronds that had flown out of the truck. When driving along River Road towards the cemetery, we passed through downtown Donaldsonville, exiting the small main street, spitting us out under the massive oil pipelines that cross the road. The transition from people centered landscapes to petrochemical dominated ones was startling. As we approached cemetery, we could see the encroachment of the petrochemical industry and the agricultural mechanisms in a single breadth.

There is no pathway nor pullover to the cemetery. We arked in a small pull off, that held piles of old furniture contrasted with the “no dumping” signs. The cemetery tree came into view across the horizon. With no direct safe pathway, we crossed the street to climb the side of the levee and use the levee trail to walk closer to the tree. Traversing back down the levee and crossing the road again we entered the sugar cane field. Entrenched in the furrows and dodging fronds, our shoes becoming caked in mud. Cane truck drivers diligently watched our movements through the field. From a distance the tree appeared small yet strong, framed by the linear rows of sugar cane, creating a runway towards the site. Approaching the tree, we felt exposed, hearts pumping anxiously, nervous someone might see us.

But once under arching tree limbs, the mood immediately shifted. Underneath we were covered and protected. Some soda cans were tossed among the underbrush, suggesting others have taken advantage of the small respite of shade. There were no perceivable burial markers. But large downed tree limbs and dense underbrush concealed the ground, making any markers easily lost amidst the branches and leaves. The sun dappled light through the dense canopy. Arching branches created frames, highlighting images of farming equipment and petrochemical towers in the distance. Once a small and isolated tree on the horizon, once underneath the canopy, the experiential scale shifted. We felt small beside the massive trunk of the tree, its diameter seemingly 6-7 feet. The sounds of the road had dampened, hearing instead the rustle of the leaves, the birds, and our own footsteps. Though beautiful and protected, the burial site felt unsettling. Combined with fears of trespassing, being cautious of the sacred space, and sadness for the isolation of the cemetery, the anxiety felt in the fields crept back in. Before leaving, we said a brief thank you to the spirits of the site, reiterating intent to observe but not harm.



Figure 18. Photcollage of the canopy and grounds of the Point Houmas Cemetery.

The emotional and physical experience of the Point Houmas site guides the exhibition design at the Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes. The primary focus is on bringing the cemetery to the visitors, without them disturbing the cemetery sites in the landscape. It helps to focus mood, audial art, curation of visual art. When visiting the gallery exhibition, guest will be immersed in imagery and sculpture that emulate the scale and quality of the cemetery canopy (Figure 21). The exhibit narrative will explore the methods of burial and funerary traditions outlined previously, developing the historical context of the experiential portion. Ultimately, the following are frameworks to be given to Black artists and curators who would amend and reconfigure the proposed vision through to fruition.

Calling on immersive exhibition designs, the goal is for visitors to feel the senses of exposure of the fields contrasted with the enclosure of the cemetery's canopy. They will learn of the burial rituals and cultural importance of funeral as a rare environment to gather and share a self-determined experience. Emulating the night ritual time, the gallery is dimly lit, with spaces of soft glow. Photographic prints, collages, and sections help to define the visual relationships between people, land, and industry through the past and present. Commissioning or curating

pieces by Black artists for permanent and rotating collections should be included in the gallery design. Sound will become important method of contextualizing the burial sites as a landscape. The sound mixture will include recordings of field conditions, the rustling of trees, insect and animal, spirituals, wailing, the polyrhythmic music created by both instruments and bodies. By melding the audio and visual components the installation becomes an immersive multi-media experience, transcending traditional art gallery and exhibition styles.

Landscape Design Interventions

This section explores the connections between burial practices, memorial and bereavement theory, and landscape design. It begins by outlining the two in landscape design proposals of the thesis. Then, this section details the memorial landscape theory, and how the design proposals can support grief, healing, and community action.

The cemetery is a place of bereavement and memorialization, more than just a space conveying a collective history of slavery and oppression. Layered within the desire to bring the enslaved story into public memory, are the themes of memorial design and necessity for spaces of remembrance. The two primary audiences throughout this project, the Black and descendant communities and those Louisiana residents outside of the Black and descendant communities. The two audiences require different forms of memorialization to reflect different needs of processing grief. The audiences also are spatially separated based on the physical access appropriate to the sites. The third layer of this thesis includes a two-part design that brings the memorial into the landscape and is supported by both the policy decisions and education center. With a light touch, the interventions are meant to aid instead of determining specific solutions.

The first layer of design cultivates access for descendant community members to the known and discovered enslaved cemeteries. Through a collaborative design process, community members can choose practical yet impactful design pieces that allow for gathering, safe pedestrian and vehicular access, continuing care, and spaces for remembrance. The second solution responds to the broader Louisiana audience. Although the cemetery landscape center serves to provide significant historical and experiential context, it does not recognize the cemetery as an everyday experience. By creating an identifiable visual reference in the landscape, people will understand the pervasiveness of the enslaved cemetery in the landscape, which has historically been imperceptible. Hopefully, inspiring new communities of people to reach out, extending their own knowledges and continuing a learning journey.

Cemetery spaces are charged places of bereavement and remembrance that are tied to sacredness. However, the cemetery as a place focuses on storing the dead and ritual commemorative activities.¹²³ Throughout our lives we both seek out and create spaces for processing expressions of grief, and often these places are linked to the landscape. Memorial spaces function in similar ways, reclaiming spaces of tragedy and seeking to turn places of horror into space for love and memory.¹²⁴ In a time when the enslaved cemetery has been systematically forgotten, turning towards memorial creation re-enlivens the landscape into an active area that remains true to the original use of the land.

Applying principles of memorials to the evolution of the enslaved cemetery site also acknowledges the erasure of the individual identities of those buried there. Judith Wasserman describes the essential pieces of a memorial landscape: “The memorial landscape serves intellectual emotional, spiritual, and communal functions including: a) a place for memory, b) a place for mourning, c) a place for reflection and healing, d) a place for ceremony, and e) a place for collective action.”¹²⁵ Though the cemetery as a landscape typology holds many of these functions, without human access to the sites, the cemetery cannot help fulfill commemorative actions. Transforming the enslaved cemetery landscapes into a series of memorials reties bereavement, grief, and ritual to the site in a new capacity, without the need to continue active burial. The community site-based landscape design engages with each of the five principles Wasserman defines. Alternatively, the more public landscape memorial network focuses most on a place for memory that inspires collective action. We cannot as a collective rewrite the records of the people who were enslaved, mistreated, and murdered. However, we can recall their legacy and places of ancestral connection to their descendent kin. As Margret Gibson writes in her text “Death and Grief in the Landscape: Private Memorials in Public Space”: “...memorials are first and foremost messages of love to the dead.”¹²⁶ We as landscape architects should radically be returning love into the landscape.

¹²³ Karen Wilson Baptist, “Diaspora: Death without a landscape,” *Mortality* 15, no. 4 (November 2010): 295.

¹²⁴ Baptist, “Diaspora: Death without a landscape,” 302.

¹²⁵ Judith R. Wasserman, “To Trace the Shifting Sands: Community, Ritual, and the Memorial Landscape,” *Landscape Journal* 17, no. 1 (1998): 42.

¹²⁶ Margaret Gibson, “Death and Grief in the Landscape: Private Memorials in Public Space,” *Cultural Studies Review* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 157.

As people, we both spiritually emerge from the land and ultimately return to the soil in death, in turn inextricably connecting our notions of death and bereavement to the elements of earth like water, rock, soil, and sky.¹²⁷ Yet overtime, the dislocation of Black and descendant communities to the burial spaces of kin has removed ritual commemoration from the landscape: offering little comfort to those grieving both the past and present.¹²⁸ Death has been broken into discrete pieces meant to be processed and compartmentalized, dealt with appropriately and essentially deemed as complete. Many of our nation's memorials were created as remembrance of an event that has a finite end. It is far easier to process the emotional strain of a challenging time that has a completion date. For example, the 9/11 Memorial and Museum recognizes a challenging point in the United States, respecting the memories of those who perished as well as those who lost people because 9/11. However, there was ultimately an end to the 9/11 events. The challenge with designing a memorial network that engages in the legacy of enslavement is that it must acknowledge the past, the present, and the trajectory of future racial-based harm. This is where a place for collective action should drive memorial design. The formation of new traditions in the cemetery landscape memorial sites needs to create transformative actions that reconcile with and advance anti-racist practices.¹²⁹

It is difficult for Black and descendant communities to explicitly trace formerly enslaved family members to a particular plantation. Especially as publicly accessible historic records like the slave schedules contain only the names of the plantation owners with only the race, gender, and age of the enslaved.¹³⁰ This makes cultivating a connection to landscape even more crucial: “In the physical absence of a loved one, material entities such as photographer, clothing, and particular landscapes become imbued with hyper-real signification. These offer temporary dwelling places for the dead; a sort of corporeal purgatory, whose material presence can comfort those experiencing loss.”¹³¹ For this reason, it is imperative that the burial spaces of the enslaved are returned to Black and descendant communities in Louisiana. Cultivating a landscape that can be reclaimed by the people who occupied it for their own expressions of loss and grief is one of many means of reparations.

¹²⁷ Baptist, “Diaspora,” 295.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹²⁹ Wasserman, “To Trace Shifting Sands,” 47.

¹³⁰ Population schedules of the seventh census of the United States, 1850, Louisiana [microform], United States, Bureau of the Census: United States, National Archives and Records Service, Accessed at <https://archive.org/details/populationschedu0242unix/page/n243/mode/2up>

¹³¹ Baptist, “Diaspora,” 299.

Cemetery Access Design

This section focuses on the aspects of the landscape design interventions that provide access for Black and descendent communities and partners to the known and discovered cemeteries of the enslaved. A light touch intervention is then necessary when designing for community access to the enslaved cemeteries. Meaning, the designer's intentions should be informed by the funerary and cultural context, though in the end defined by the wants and needs of Black and descendant community partners. The design installations intentionally limit the modification of the existing cemetery landscape when incorporating built work. This design focuses on creating a series of need-based site interventions that respond to specific access and comfort needs necessary to interact with the cemetery sites. Point Houmas Cemetery, Silvery Cemetery, Alma Cemetery, and Bruslie Cemetery, are all places where the development of a community cemetery memorial would be appropriate. The designs can be amended and changed by each group responsible for the different cemeteries. The key community needs this design responds to are: (1) physical accessibility, (2) continued care, and (3) gathering or ceremonial space.¹³²

First, safe physical accessibility must be addressed (Figure 22). Along both the roads that wind along the Mississippi River, as well as the highways that have emerged on the backside of the former plantation properties, there are few places to stop and pull over. In order to first provide access, parking and pull off space is necessary. Though some places may need parking for a few cars, it may also be appropriate to allow space for a bus to pull over safely. Bus parking should not be utilized by tourism, instead by churches, community organizations, and groups who may gather in larger numbers who meet at an external place and travel together to the site. Though these needs are pragmatic, roads and parking create formal infrastructure that provides both physical and emotional safety. Simple parking with explicit signage creates a precedent that outwardly expresses that community members are visiting a place they have a distinct right to be at. Without formal demarcation of space, it is easier for begrudging landowners and public vigilantes to claim private property, accosting those who are there to grieve and or celebrate. To be clear, returning land access and ownership of the cemetery properties to Black and descendant

¹³² Terry L. Jones, "Researcher maps hidden graveyards of slaved who once tilled Louisiana sugar cane fields," *The Advocate*, February 5, 2017.
https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_7f0fd2e8-e966-11e6-91bd-7b5708a1dc45.html

communities will not be universally accepted. As landscape architects, we can use the tools of placemaking that visually cue a place as being publicly accessible.

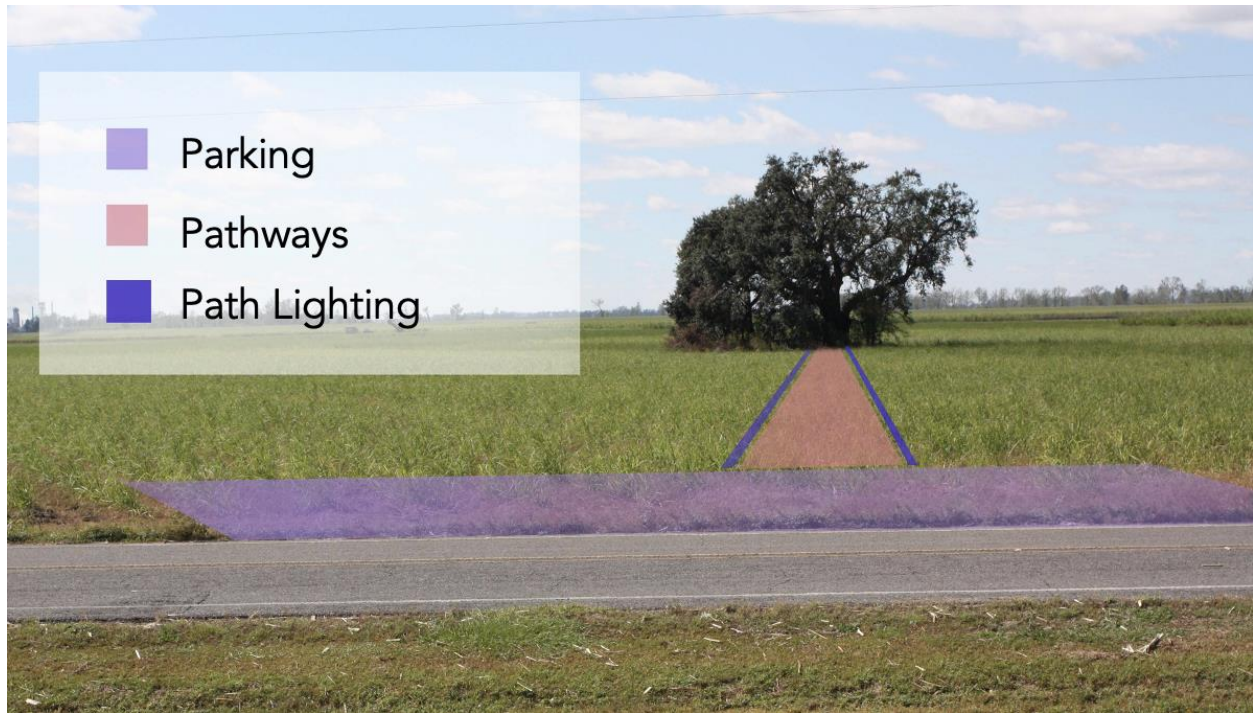


Figure 19. Diagram of basic site necessities that provide safe and formal access to the burial sites.

Some of these placemaking cues include signage with brief historical context and explanation of the land easement system. Intentional materiality can also be used to demarcate the space as a place of gathering. In paving patterns, finishes, and site furnishings, the material qualities of burial rituals should be referenced. One such way would be to reference the post death bodily preparation where the stomach is covered in salt to protect the living from the dead's spirit.¹³³ A salt finished concrete paving pattern can be installed, where the salt is used to pattern the final concrete surface of the parking or pathway areas. This technique would be contrasted with mosaics. People were often buried with materials like shells, broken pottery, mirrored surfaces, beads, and other objects¹³⁴. These materials are excellent for mosaic work, combining the materials of burial with African American patterns and symbolism. The mosaic designs could be commissioned by local artists and community members for each cemetery, infusing local and regional community differences into each cemetery memorial.

¹³³ Alho, "The Religion of the Slaves," 159-160.

¹³⁴ Jamieson, *Rituals of Resistance*, 49-51.

The material qualities of the parking and roadside meeting space will infuse into the pathways. Once people have gathered at the site, visitors need safe and accessible pathways to travel through the agriculture fields to the cemetery. In an Advocate article focused on grassroots work supporting enslaved cemetery preservation by the Westside Cemetery Preservation Association, they describe Anita Gray. Gray uses a wheelchair which makes it difficult to visit her family buried on plantation land. She can no longer access her familial graves as there are no pathways that can accommodate her.¹³⁵ If elders in each community are no longer able to access family plots, they lose the ability to bring younger generations to the cemeteries. Creating accessible pathways allows for both physical access and continued sharing of familial lineage through oral history. The pathway also presents the opportunity for reiterating the relationship of waterways to the cemetery and funerary ritual. Incorporating mosaic or paving patterns that reference the bayous and riverine systems seek reconnect the cemetery to its original watery context. Finally, the pathway serves as the precession space. At cemetery sites where the land easement does not have an agreement to continue farming practices, trees providing shade and enclosure should be planted along the pathway. Not only does this serve for comfort, but it also shelters from the emotional exposure of walking through the agriculture fields. Path lighting should be incorporated for nighttime visitation, when the funerals and funeral processions occurred.

Once people gain safe passage to the cemetery, they may choose their practical, emotional, and ritual design needs. These include interventions like storage space for tools for maintenance, water collection and for grave washing or watering plants, space for seating and rest, reflection space, and storytelling and group narrative space. For gathering space at the site, a circular layout will tie back to the motions of dance and movement that accompanied the vocalizations during the committal of the body into the grave.¹³⁶ Further, it would serve as a space for sharing narratives, dance, music, oral histories, and grief. Different site amenities may also be appropriate at the discretion of the caretakers including night and path lighting, fencing or boundary markers, and additional signage. Together these suggestions allow for caretakers and communities to decide the level of interaction they choose to have with the cemetery, as well as the maintenance capacity they have (Figure 23). Volunteers coordinated by the cemetery landscape center may also be used for added labor and support. Overall, the accessible cemetery

¹³⁵ Jones, "Researcher maps hidden graveyards of slaved who once tilled Louisiana sugar cane fields."

¹³⁶ Rabotaue, *Slave Religion*, 72.

site design should first respond to the wishes and needs of the community, fusing material and ritual qualities of funeral practices to create a rich memorial.

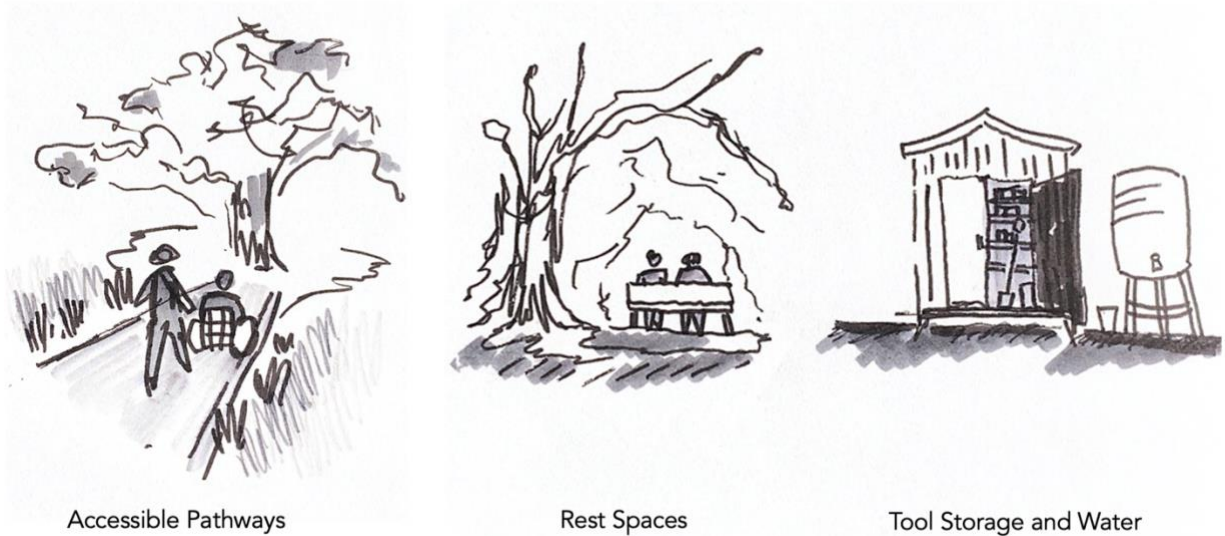


Figure 20. Drawings of site amenities communities might request for their cemeteries.

Network Landscape Memorial Design

This section details the memorial landscape network, bringing cemeteries of the enslaved to public memory. It begins by framing the necessity for a network of landscape markers to denote the cemeteries. Then, the work describes the form in which these markers would take.

The second design installation connects the cemetery sites to the everyday visual landscape to create a memorial network. The proposal includes a landscape based visual marker at each known and suspected cemetery site (Figure 24). These installations do not allow for people to visit the sites. They will strictly be perceived from a vehicle. In turn the design of a public memorial network draws heavily from theory of roadside memorials. Gibson describes how deaths that occur on the road are separated from common themes of memorialization because they are spatially and temporally disconnected from our typical perceptions of death.¹³⁷ A highway or road is a type of non-place that we never truly inhabit, they are only perceived while moving through them towards another destination. Similarly, the average person travelling

¹³⁷ Gibson, "Death and Grief," 156-158.

through the Louisiana landscape will likely never stop at these cemeteries, only experiencing their presence out the window of a vehicle. More rarely, they may view them on a bike or walk along the levee.

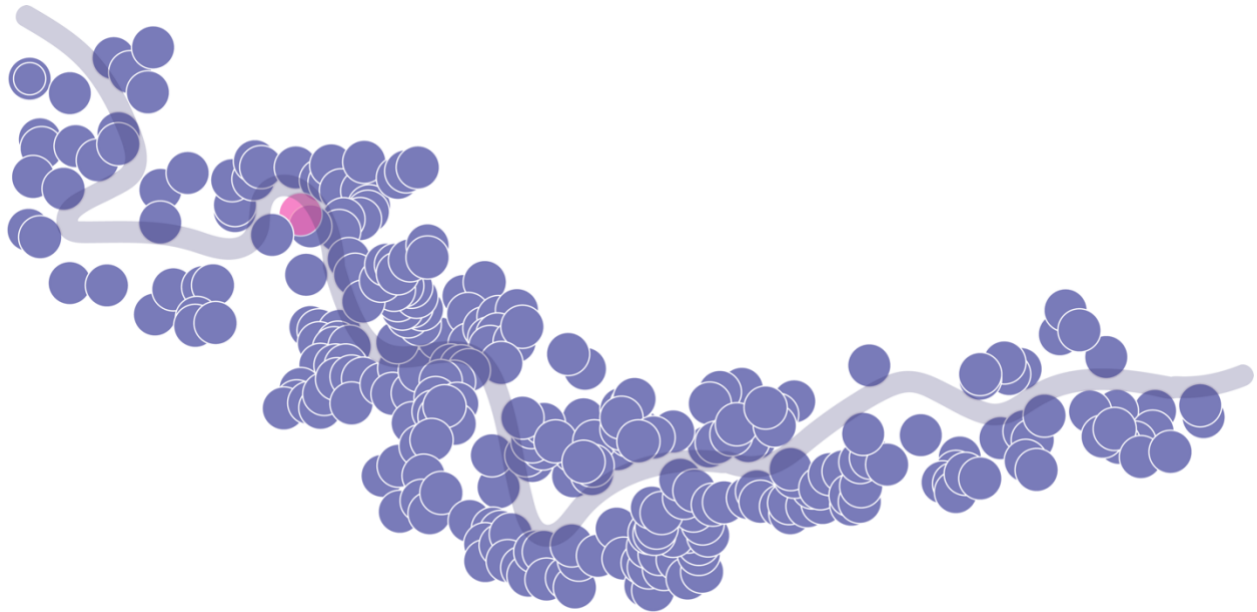


Figure 21. Diagrammatic map that showcases the ways a network of sites could be overlapped to develop a series of landscape memorial designs. The network is formed around the Mississippi River flowing through the Louisiana region.

Further, as people who travel along roads and recognize a visual marker, they internalize roadside memorials as integral landscape forms, making them part of their own daily experience.¹³⁸ Together, this means the design for the memorial network installations must be eye-catching and legible from a distance while traveling in a moving vehicle. Signage would not be an appropriate installation as it would be difficult to read and absorb while travelling quickly past it. Instead, each marker should inspire the viewer to question what the marker is, make a mental note of its location and proximity to other markers, and wonder how they can further get involved. Finally, the hope is that observers internalize the memorials and build them into their own participation in the landscape: “As expressions of personal loss, grief and memory, these memorials have the potential to be meaningful to strangers in their own or other’s recognition of mortality- or indeed their own experience and biographies of bereavement.”¹³⁹ When designing a memorial network, it must be approachable for many audiences, but also intriguing enough for

¹³⁸ Gibson, “Death and Grief,” 159.

¹³⁹ Gibson, “Death and Grief,” 156.

the viewer to bring it into their everyday lives. The design proposal includes creating a series of landscape installation markers at known and cemetery locations along the Mississippi River corridor.

The design of the installations was inspired by the enslaved funerary ceremony. In reference to midnight funeral, I propose a “Light Touch” memorial network. The Light Touch memorial network is a series of marks that illuminate the ground in the shape of graves at each cemetery site that is known (Figure 25). The funerary ceremonies occurred at night and were only lit by torchlight. In turn, the cemetery spaces were often only visited and perceived at night by enslaved peoples.¹⁴⁰ Now, as people travel through the through Louisiana in the evening and nighttime hours, a series of soft glowing graves will emerge from the woody edges. They come in and out of focus, dotting the countryside. Further, the scale of the glowing rectangles allows them to be installed in urban contexts. The size of a grave (2.5’ by 8’)¹⁴¹ would fit along sidewalk medians and small urban greenspaces. The lit markers would be installed in places like LSU Health Center where a cemetery was paved over or destroyed for the sake of development.

Putting them in more urban settings also shares the memorial with a larger audience. Imagine, overtime as one comes to drive or walk their customary route that they know around the bend are two illuminations, followed by a third before their next turn. Each becomes a landmark in someone’s journey through the landscape. With supplementary media made available to the public by the cemetery landscape center, people can research these glowing lights, finding out more information on their history and purpose. Especially in urban contexts where people are likely to walk past a marker, signage explaining the installation will give resources for further exploration. These markers engage a constant acknowledgement of the history of slavery within the landscapes people in Louisiana inhabit.

¹⁴⁰ Rainville, *Hidden History*, 55.

¹⁴¹ Reference, “What is the size of a standard grave?,” last updated March 31, 2020, <https://www.reference.com/world-view/size-standard-grave-e5cefdfa02efc04b>



Figure 22. Explorative render of the glowing earth at night, highlighting the cemeteries.

One challenge is the balance between visualizing the extent of the cemeteries throughout the landscape without breaking boundaries of privacy set forth by descendent communities. Given the existing limited knowledge by the public and difficulty with physical access, it would be difficult for people with harmful intentions to make their way to the cemetery sites and cause damage or destruction. Though a substantial concern, it would be possible to install the interventions along the roadsides in the approximate area with proper quantity and proportion, but not in the exact location. Allowing for people to know they are common within the landscape without subjecting the cemeteries to additional risk. With permission, they could be placed at the precise location. Additionally, it may be difficult to encourage landowners to allow for these installations on their land. With the help of the cultural landscape center, they would have a significant institution to field comments and concerns. Fortunately, as the cemetery land was unproductive farmland, the memorial network would not interfere with agricultural production.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

These design proposals work in tandem with one another. Each focusing on a different audiences need but providing acknowledgement of and access to the cemetery spaces of the enslaved: the cemetery site specific work providing access to descendant communities, while the memorial network provides visual access to knowledge and a larger illuminative narrative of slavery. Additionally, the exhibition in the cemetery landscape center provides the immersive landscape experience without entering the cemetery sites. The role of the landscape architect here is to develop intimate relationships between the cemetery landscape, community access, public acknowledgment of slavery, and further development of preservation efforts. Often the discipline of landscape architecture focuses on the design of a single site. In the case of slavery in Louisiana, the site is a network of plantations that each have their own context, history, and remaining physical integrity. To begin to provide reparations entails a process beyond the singular place. The cemeteries require financial, educational, and political support.

Acknowledging our history of slavery and its deep-rooted connection to landscape is imperative before we can begin to propose landscape-based reparations. Landscape architecture should endeavor to branch into policy and conservation easements to ensure each cemetery of the formerly enslaved is cared for and protected. Further, landscape practitioners should ensure the cemeteries are returned to Black and descendant communities. This cannot happen without monetary and actionable support. Through creating the Center for the Study and Preservation of Enslaved Cemetery Landscapes, supportive policy, grant writing, educational workshops, and archival resources are available. The center's primary commitment is to unburden Black community organizations by providing labor, support for their needs, and educating people on the legacy of slavery. By providing a gallery with experiential exhibitions showcasing the power of the cemeteries today, visitors can be involved without trampling upon the sacred cemetery sites.

Finally, through acknowledgement and education we can return the cemetery land to Black and descendant communities with community driven design offerings that respond to their unique wants and needs. For those who travel through the Louisiana plantation landscape, they will experience a series of installations that consistently bring the legacy of enslavement to public memory. Louisiana is not the only part of the United States or the World reconciling with legacies of colonialism and slavery. This work seeks to expand the ways we pursue preservation

and memorialization in future reparative acts. Landscape architecture can extend beyond the framework of a single site design to create layered responses to challenging landscape issues. By extending our capabilities into the public and private realms we can provide more holistic support that is rooted in care. This work endeavors to honor enslaved peoples and their descendants through recognition of their cemeteries. It brings attention, access, and action to the cemeteries and their respective descendant communities through a lens of care.

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