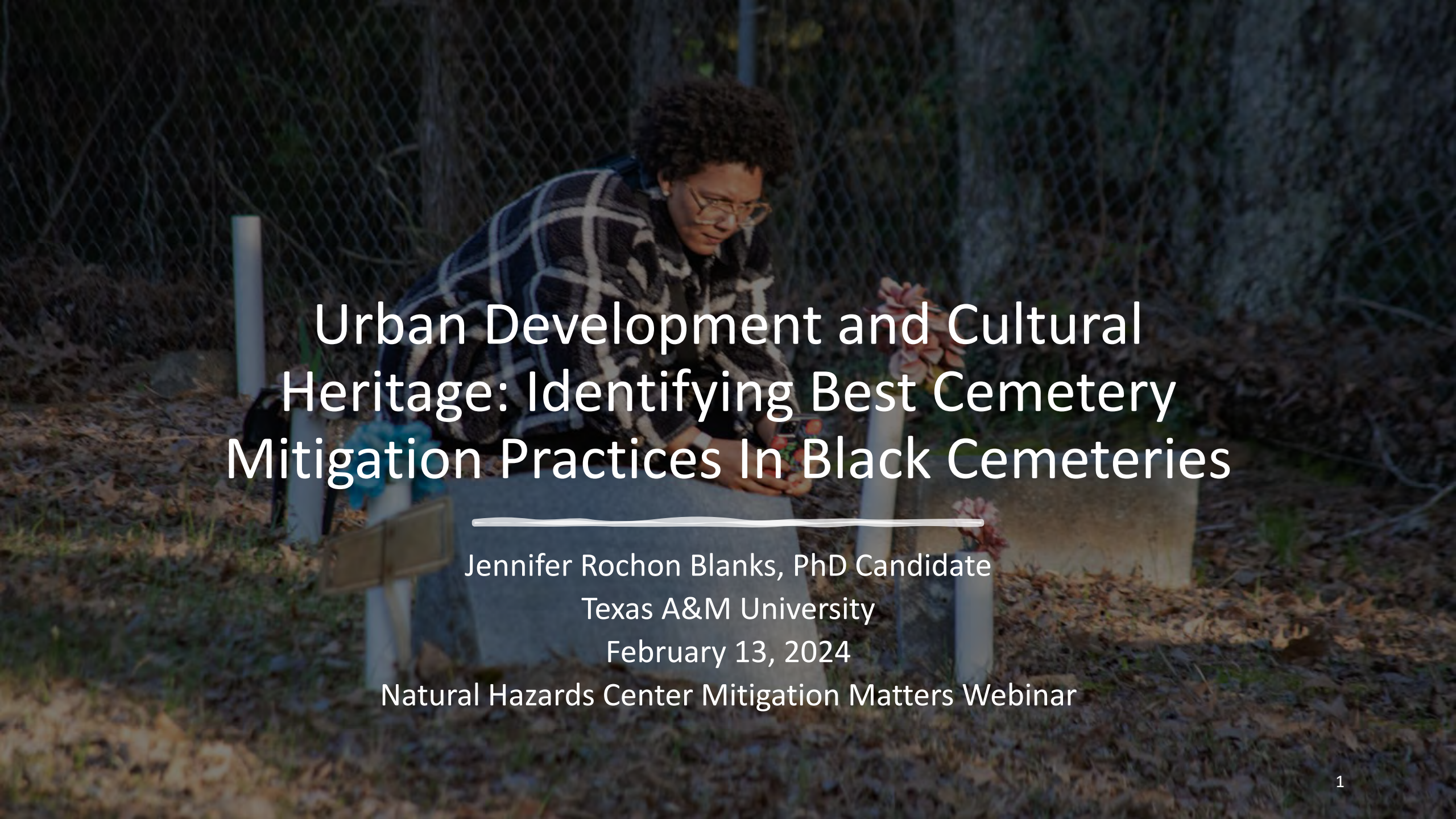

Urban Development and Cultural Heritage: Identifying Best Cemetery Mitigation Practices In Black Cemeteries

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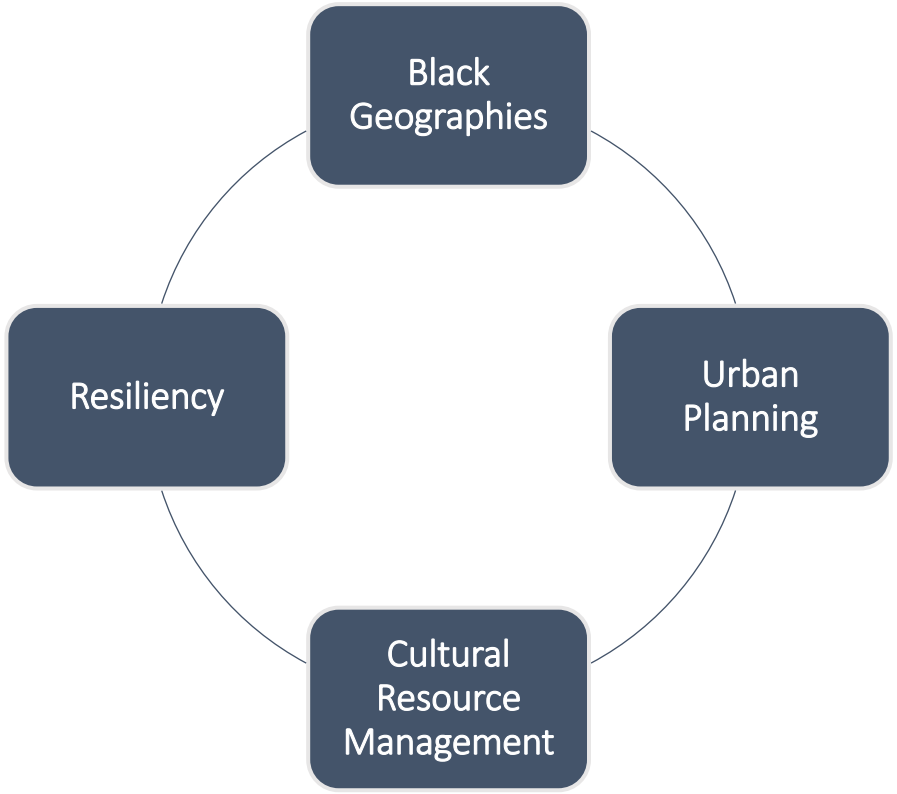
Texas A&M University
February 13, 2024
Natural Hazards Center Mitigation Matters Webinar

Sites of Resiliency, Remembrance, and Reclamation

Organizers from the Louisiana Bucket Brigade protest the expansion of the Formosa chemical plant from further encroachment on the cemetery

Theoretical Framework



- Connecting these bodies of literature create a framework that converges the conversation to study Black cultural sites through a critical lens
- Emphasizes the Black spatial experiences of the resource
- Can be applied to other cultural resources
  - Churches
  - Schools
  - Etc.

Excavation site of Sugar Land 95 Prison Labor Burial Ground

Erasing Cultural Heritage from Urban Landscapes

- Researchers within the realm of black geographies conceptualize urban landscapes as both tangible proof of and crucial channels through which racial processes are carried out.
  - Transportation projects
  - Natural resource management
  - Eminent domain
  - Redling
  - Disenfranchisement

Bethany Cemetery, the first Black cemetery in Austin, faces demolition by developers.

Cultural Resources in the Landscape of Black Geography

- Cultural resources are evidence of past human activity, settlement patterns, and traditions

- Erasure of cultural resources deprives geographers of physical evidence crucial for understanding these landscapes and mirrors the broader spatial concerns Black communities face.
  - Loss of memory
  - Knowledge of place
  - Cultural heritage
  - Customs

Heritage Stewardship: Managing Cultural Resources in Texas

- Comprehensive policies safeguard historic burial grounds, addressing ownership, access, desecration, and abandonment.
  - **Local:** Varies based on county policies and designations
  - **State:** The Texas Historical Commission (THC) plays a pivotal role, assisting citizens and organizations in cemetery preservation through workshops, training, and the Historic Texas Cemetery (HTC) designation process.
  - **Federal:** 2021 African American Burial Grounds Study Act empowers the National Park Service to identify and preserve historic African American cemeteries, emphasizing care for graves and repatriation of human remains.

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

Research Objectives

1. Recover lost memories within the cemetery landscapes
2. Conduct cemetery risk assessment
3. Compare geo-ethnographic strategies to determine best practices for community engagement

Pyland African American Cemetery

Methodology

Case study background	Data Collection	Analysis
• Jefferson, Texas • Corinth Baptist Church Cemetery • Pyland African American Cemetery	• Photo mapping • Sketch map • Semi-structured interview • Field Observations	• Coding • Themes

Date	Location	Coordinated by	Workshop Title	Duration	Number of Participants
July 23, 2021	Corinth Baptist Church	Corinth Baptist Church	Corinth Cemetery Day	70mins.	20
October 29, 2022	Corinth Baptist Church	Jennifer Blanks	Cemetery Management 101	90mins.	10
March 18, 2023	Corinth Baptist Church	Jennifer Blanks	Sketch Map Training	90mins.	4
May 27, 2023	Pyland African American Cemetery	Pyland African American Cemetery	Historical Marker Ceremony	70mins.	50+
					Total number of participants: 85+

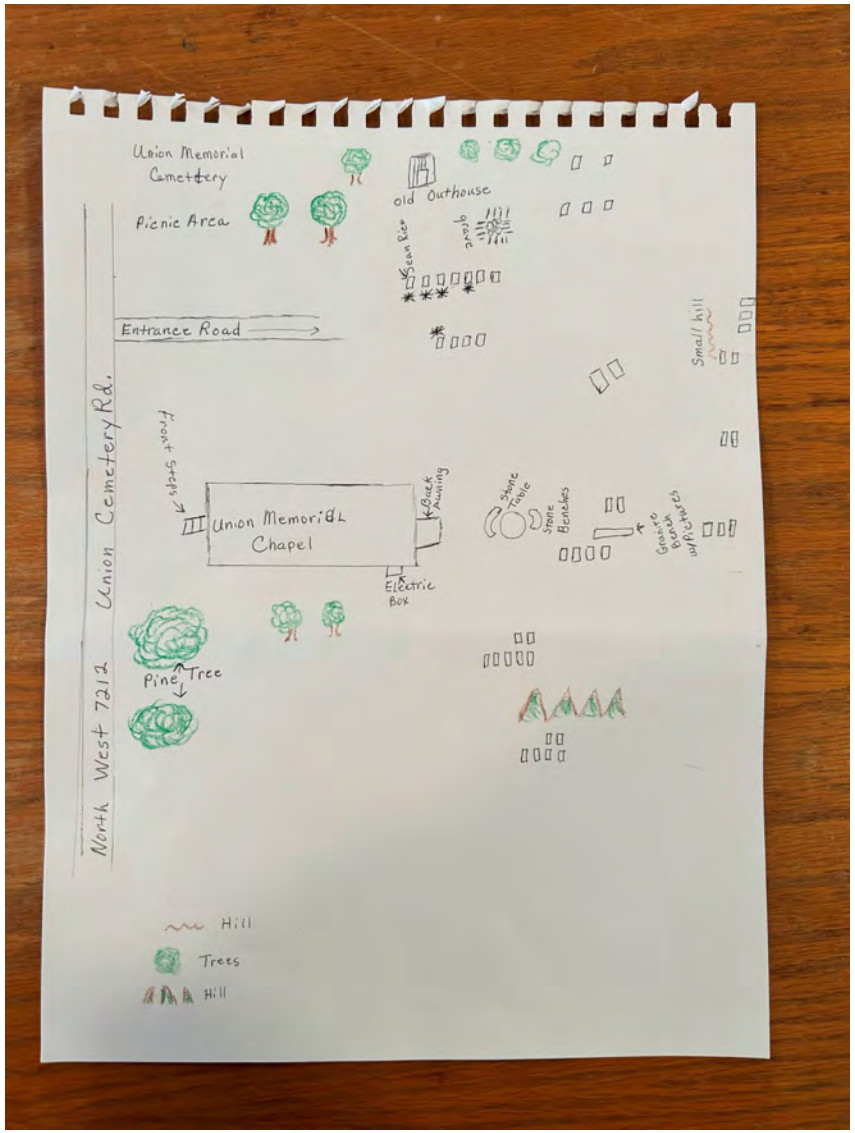
Participatory Action Research For Data: Workshops and Research

- Corinth Baptist Church hosted a Cemetery Preservation Workshop Series.
- Intended Audience
  - Cemetery stewards,
  - Volunteers,
  - Historians,
  - Descendants of relatives buried in a Black cemetery in the Northeast Texas region,
  - Community leaders
- Data collection occurred simultaneously during the workshops.

Jennifer demonstrates how to conduct photo mapping

Method 1: Photo Mapping

- The process of creating maps or spatial data by using photographs and images.
  - Geotagging
  - Cultural heritage documentation
- Walked through the cemetery with a participant at the end of each workshop.
- Team independently conducted a cemetery assessment to compliment the participants data



Union Memorial Cemetery Sketch Map

Method 2: Sketch Map Worksheet

Participants completed a short answer worksheet (IRB approved)

Essential features or locations	Recent experiences and memories	Events or traditions	Significant locations	Management issues

Collect information about spatial knowledge about their perception and account of the cemetery and use of it (cultural practices, customs, etc.)

Post workshop conversation with community member

Method 3: Semi Structured Interviews

Short answer responses on the sketch map worksheet also doubled as semi-structure interview questions.

Ideal for participants who:

Did not want to draw a sketch map	Preferred one on one conversation	Interested in follow-up resource

Method 4: Field Observation

- Team followed participants throughout the cemetery during walkthrough of photo mapping exercise
- Documented oral stories
- Documented cemetery management issues
- Recorded footage of cemetery tour/walk through
- Observed celebrations and annual events

Observing PAAC Historical Marker Ceremony

Data Analysis: Coding

- Create a codebook using an initial set of codes created prior to the analysis.
- The codes were determined based on existing cultural heritage site management themes determined by international cultural heritage site organizations:
  - ICCROM
  - UNESCO World Heritage List
  - Disaster Risk Indicators

Format for the nomination of properties for inscription on the World Heritage List (2015)	ICCROM (2009)	Disaster-Risk Indicators in Taiwan (2016)
Development Pressures	Buildings and Development	Disaster history
	Transportation Infrastructure	Improper placement of items
	Utilities or Service Infrastructure	
Environmental Pressures	Pollution	Pests or ants road
	Biological resource use/modification	Increased moisture, wall seepage serious
	Physical resource extraction	
	Local conditions affecting physical fabric	
Natural disasters and risk preparedness	Climate change and sever weather events	Other factors
	Sudden ecological or geological events	
	Invasive/alien species or hyperabundant species	
Responsible visitation at World Heritage sites	Transportation Infrastructure	Other factors
	Utilities or Service Infrastructure	
	Other human activities	
Number of inhabitants within the property and the buffer zone	Social/cultural uses of heritage	The use of fire
	Other human activities	Improper placement of items
		Undated environmental clean-up
		Excessive electrical facilities, lines of old (including extension cords)
	Management and institutional factors	The use of fire
		Improper placement of items
		Undated environmental clean-up
		Excessive electrical facilities, lines of old (including extension cords)
		Management organization and lack of staff
		Failure in regularly attending relevant course of certificates
		Cooperation with community
		Lack of fire-fighting equipment
		Lack of monitoring alarm
		Insufficient entrances (including those are often closed)
		Unused to be repaired/repair/repaired
		Gutters are not smooth
		Doors and windows damaged
	Other factors	Other factors

Results: Emerging Themes

- **Environmental Pressure = total 200**
  - Depression
  - Erosion
  - Wildlife
  - Vegetation
- **Inhabitants of Property = total 300**
  - Artifacts
  - Ornamental Features
  - People (visitors, etc.)
  - Gathering/Events
  - Stewarding
- **Development Pressure = total 45**
  - Boundary
  - Transportation Infrastructure

Natural Risk and Hazard = total 25

Development
Maintenance/Stewarding
Cultural Heritage

Responsible Visitation = total 254

Headstones
Boundary
Infrastructure
Gatherings
Maintenance/Stewarding

Other = total 30

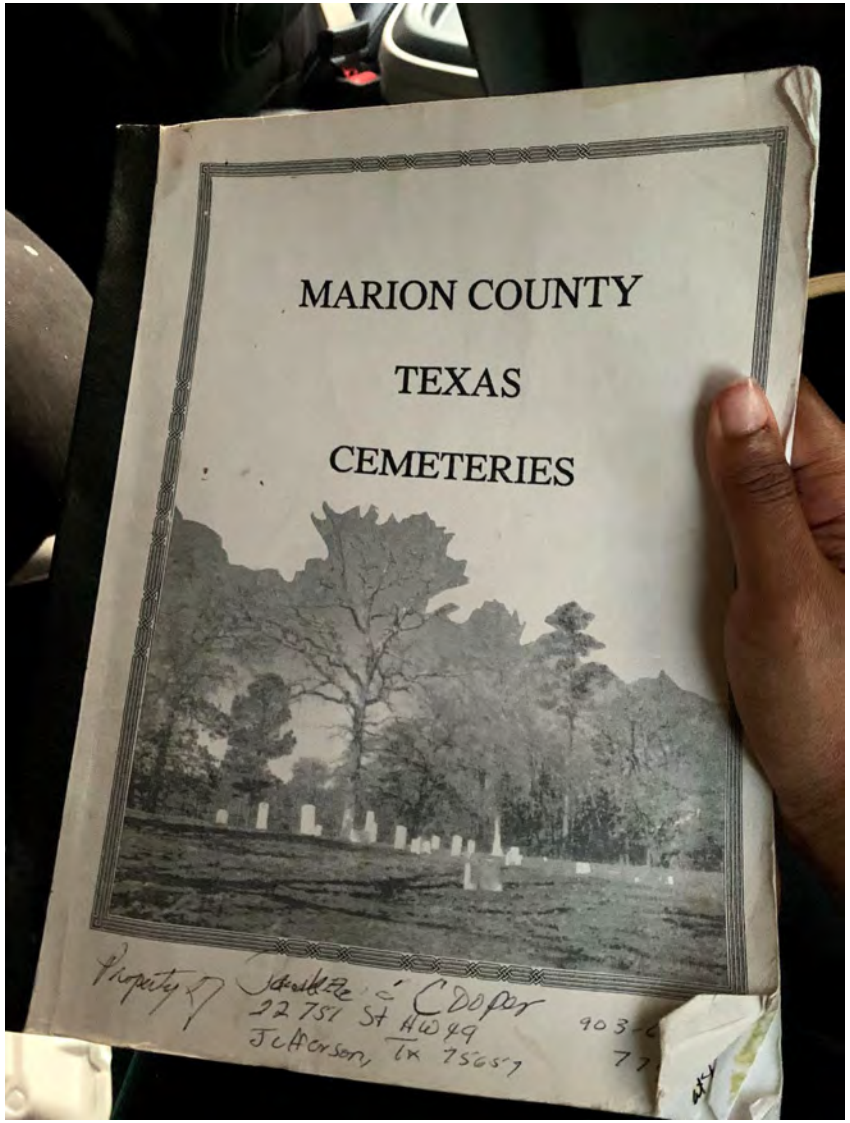
Social Threats and Education
Community
Connectivity

Tangible Features

- Headstones: Marker or monument placed on a grave to memorialize and identify the person buried there.
  - Physical presence that can be visited by friends, family, and loved ones.
  - Carry symbolic and emotional significance, serving as a focal point for remembrance and reflection

- Ornamental Feature: Personal way to decorate headstones and connect with the memory of the deceased
  - Inscriptions
  - Names, DOB, DOD
  - Portraits
  - Other sentiments and symbols

Alfred Martin Headstone in Corinth Baptist Cemetery



Handbook of Cemeteries in Marin County

Intangible Features

- Stories: Existence in the mind on the shared cultural consciousness is created through language and imagination and the essence of a story is conveyed through words, thoughts, and emotions.
- Digital Form: Stories or histories are medium of transmission (books, videos, etc.) is the tangible but the story itself is still an intangible creating in the human mind
  - Pyland sketch map
  - Marion County Cemetery book

Comprehensive Cemetery Headstone Risk Assessment Tool

Cemetery Name: Pyland African American Cemetery Updated By: Jennifer Blanks Date Last Updated: 20-Jan-24

					Inherent Risk (without controls)					Residual Risk (with controls)		
Unique ID	Risk Description	Caused by & Consequences	Physical Feature Type	Priority Value	Likeliness	Impact	Risk Rating	Tangible or Intangible	Mitigation	Residual Probability	Residual Impact	Residual Risk Rating
1	Veteran headstone	**Caused by**: Sinking headstone, soft spot in ground. **Consequences**: Trip hazards, possibly exposed human remains or coffin	Burial plot/headstone	High	High	High	Critical	Intangible	Contract a repair shop	Low	Medium	Moderate
2	Toppled tree	**Caused by**: Likely due to age of and size of tree and/or weather conditions (drought and strong wind). **Consequences**: Fell on top the fence and into the cemetery. Someone could have gotten hurt.	Vegetation	Low	Medium	High	Severe	Tangible	Routine tree maintance to prevent future falls from other trees.	Medium	Very High	Critical
3	Risk 3	Caused by: Consequences:			Low	High	Severe			Very High	High	Criticial
4	Risk 4	Caused by: Consequences:										
5												
6												
7												

PAACC
PYLAND AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERY CHARTER

The Pyland African American Cemeter

Established in 188

Welcome to the Pyland African American Cemetery - one of the oldest black cemeteri in the East Texas area.

Sanctioned a Texas Historical Site by the Texa Historical Commission, the Pyland African American Cemetery is one of only a handful black cemeteries operating under a 501(c)(3) designation via the Pyland African American Cemetery Charter (also known as "The PAACC").

How To Become A Member

You may become a Member by donating $100 per year renewable every 12 months.

As a Member, you will receive a reduced rate on your burial fee, which is $300 for a Member-in-Good-Standing or $500 if not in good standing.

The PAACC's Mission

The PAACC's mission is:

- to preserve the history of and
- make improvements to the grounds of the cemetery.
- to establish burial fees,
- oversee the ongoing operations of the cemetery and ensure the future of this great historical site.

DONATIONS

Donations can be made on our website **www.thepaacc.org** via the security of PayPal or your debit or credit card.

Donations can also be mailed to:
Pyland African American Cemetery
P.O. Box 40645
Fort Worth, TX 76140

WAYS TO GIVE

ONLINE • BY MAIL

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you have questions about Pyland African American Cemetery, please contact one of the PAACC Representatives listed below. **All burials must be coordinated through one of the PAACC Representatives below to determine Membership status and burial fees.**

Linda Cooper – 469.520.1748 | Matthew Lamb – 903.503.8704 | Harvey James – 903.720.5654

Flyer Designed by TruToneMedia.com

Discussion: Critical Management

- Perception of cemetery is changing based on critical needs identified by stewards
- Creating Solutions to address management problems
  - Annual events and gatherings
  - Annual fundraising opportunities
- Ongoing discussion and conversation to define cemetery boundaries
- Provide routine perpetual care
- Urgency to preserve the deceased legacy; disconnection from younger descendants and youth
- Sharing information