



Haunting as Agency: A Critical Cultural Landscape Approach to Making Black Labor Visible in Sugar Land, Texas

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Abstract

This paper contextualizes the most recent discovery of 95 forgotten graves of incarcerated laborers at a public school construction site within ongoing tensions around public history, race, and development in Sugar Land, Texas, a Houston-area bedroom community. Unearthed along with the graves is the state's long history of Black labor exploitation, from enslavement to convict leasing to employment with Imperial Sugar. In this article, I engage the haunting of Black laboring bodies in the landscape from the perspective of both that of a researcher and former resident of Fort Bend County confronted with the purposeful forgetting of Black geographies, bodies, and lives. I expose through critical analysis of government documents, online digital exhibits, maps, photos, and autoethnographic recollection of the area, the haunting of Black laboring bodies in not only the site of burial discovery but also two sites within the Sugar Land cultural landscape: Mayfield Park and the Imperial Sugar Refinery. I argue developers and government agencies perpetuate a mythic local history that, until the discovery of the 95, allowed them to disassociate itself from Sugar Land's history of Black labor exploitation before its incorporation as a city. The 95's haunting allows for an inventive awareness of the Black laboring bodies and thus redefines the cultural landscape rooted in plantation logics as a Black geography. I conclude with a discussion of the ways Black laboring bodies' haunting creates a space for a critical cultural landscape solution.



Keywords

Black geographies; urban planning; cultural landscapes; sprawl; suburban landscapes; labor

Introduction

The City of Sugar Land, Texas, is a Houston-bedroom community with a population of 80,000 people in 2011, was up to 118,600 by 2018. Rapid population growth, a decrease in available vacant land, and increased traffic have transformed the mostly suburban area of Fort Bend County's landscape and planning agenda. Top priorities preserve planned communities filled with single-family homes, create mixed-use commons, facilitate transportation improvements, and build schools to educate the growing number of students. In the most recent land-use plan, the City lists among its historically significant buildings the Imperial Sugar Char House, Imperial Three-Bay Warehouse, the Sugar Land Auditorium, the Central State Farm Unit, and the Central Unit prison (City of Sugar Land 2018). However, the Plan never addresses the City's history of enslavement, incarceration, and segregation that these structures hold.

However, in February 2018, the bodies of 95 formerly incarcerated men and women, who died in the late 19th and early 20th century, were discovered beneath a school construction site. Unearthing this cemetery has forced the City Sugar Land and Fort Bend County to confront the difficult heritage of convict leasing and the community's long dark history of labor exploitation (see Figure 1). The Mayor of Sugar Land and the superintendent of Fort Bend Independent School District (FBISD) had to engage concurrently long-simmering tensions around growth demands, taxes, and questions of historic significance at the burial site. Options explored included whether the 95 would remain in place and a new school building site located, continuing to build the school while relocating bodies to a prison inmate cemetery nearby, or engaging stakeholders over time about ways to memorialize, secure, and maintain the burial space as is. However, this article's focus is not just the engagement and decision making around the remains of the 95 souls discarded like refuse near a work camp over 100 years ago. Instead, I contextualize the Sugar Land 95's disinterment as a haunting milestone for exploited Black laboring bodies. In Sugar Land's landscape of plantations, prison farms, refinery complex, worker "Quarters" original purposes—racial violence and bondage—exploited Black laboring bodies have been purposefully forgotten.



Figure 1: Burial site. The burial site is near a work camp where convict leasing victims engaged in hard labor on Imperial Prison Farm. There were 94 males (one of whom was a young teenager and one woman’s remains. Photo by Fort Bend Independent School District.

In this article, I engage the historical and cultural landscape from the perspective of that of a researcher, a former resident of Fort Bend County, a Black woman. I expose the culture of purposeful forgetting (Inwood and Alderman 2016, 12), which I term *racialized* because this form of forgetting is about the specific reading of deceased, incarcerated African Americans as Black laboring bodies, not persons. How do Black bodies trouble public discourse, histories, and decision-making processes to become visible and regain agency in the present?

I examine Black laboring persons’ temporal persistence through haunting in Sugar Land’s development and public history discourse even in the face of racialized purposeful forgetting. Haunting is, as Avery Gordon defines it, “one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (such as with transatlantic slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is continuously denied (such as with free labor or national security)” (Gordon 2011, 2). Gordon also describes haunting as a state in which a phenomenon, a memory, or a ghost “prompts a something-to-be-done” and complicates linear experiences of time (Gordon 2011, 2). Haunting demands recognition of an assumption that a wrong has been resolved or forgotten. On a personal level, haunting is also part of my autoethnographic

experience of the landscape as I recall childhood glimpses of incarcerated Black bodies and conduct historical research on the way they shaped the landscape in which I was born. Through these processes of embodied and archival research, I locate the barriers to burial justice for the 95. The most visible barrier is the lack of cultural continuity in the landscape, which explains the emplacement of Black laboring bodies in spaces layered with the history of plantations, prisons, refineries, convict Quarters, and company housing.

My principal concern is how Black laboring bodies' haunting—existing at the intersection of the public and personal narratives—can become a form of resistance to purposeful forgetting of this multilayered cultural landscape made profitable through the exploitation of Black laboring bodies. Scholars characterize those engaged in haunting as having agency and creating space. Rhaisa Williams contends,

Haunting is affective, experiential, and always locative. It can be said that hauntings are one way to describe how we carry locations, how we carry geographies. The hollow places in words and objects are the space into which memories flood. It is a flooding that disrupts daily attempts to retreat from the world. "I gets no sleep." It is also a flooding that re-marks geographies as recitations of what used to be here and what someone used to do there. (Williams 2018, 772)

Convict leasing victims, their emergence in public discourse, and their physical discovery; trouble the perceived order of the Sugar Land's landscape and decision-making regime regulating land use by forcing recollection of that which is purposefully forgotten. Sugar palimpsests make "messy topographies" (Williams 2018, 773).

Haunting has agency because it is intrusive and interrupts the norm. Nadir Kinossian writes that haunting "transgresses various borders that define everyday existence," all at once metaphysical, temporal, and spatial. Kinossian goes on to add "Transgression of the borders guarding 'normality' makes human involvement with haunted landscapes or places emotionally tense and challenging. Landscapes and places are haunted by memories of people who once lived, suffered, or died there" (Kinossian 2018, 2). In Sugar Land, a Houston bedroom community, the 95 who lived and suffered through convict leasing trouble the everyday sublimity of suburban culture and development.

Through reviews of public documents and press releases explaining public officials' decision-making process in Sugar Land, Sanborn maps, and marketing materials, I examine the local government's efforts to disassociate the Sugar Land of today from its convict leasing past. Past conflicts over land use where sugar refinery workers once worked laid the groundwork, I argue, for how Fort Bend Independent School District and the City of Sugar Land struggle with how best to manage clashes over whether to continue building a school atop a burial ground. The paper focuses on two moments and iconic spaces: Mayfield Park and the Imperial Sugar Refinery

Complex. My interest in these spaces focuses on how they relate to slavery and convict leasing to contextualize the treatment of the Sugar Land 95 and explicate racialized purposeful forgetting. Mayfield Park is a small community in which convicts and then former sugar refinery workers lived in once substandard conditions before housing stock's conversion to federally subsidized single-family homes in the 1950s. The nearby Imperial Sugar Refinery Complex (Figure 2), where Mayfield Park residents once worked, was converted to upper income, mixed-use development with a carefully constructed public history component that purposely erased not only Mayfield Park but also all exploited Black laboring bodies.



Figure 2: The iconic Imperial Sugar Building located in Sugar Land, Texas on State Highway 90 behind railroad tracks. The refinery, which stopped being operational in 2003, is now the site of mixed-use development and weekend farmer's markets. Photo by Author.

I argue that understanding earlier patterns of erasure and invisibility explain the initial resistance to public engagement around the fate of the Sugar Land 95. Once home to prisoner barracks when the area was known as the "Quarters," Mayfield Park became a community of single-family homes where descendants of many Black and Brown Imperial Sugar Refinery workers still live. I recall worshipping in a church adjacent to the community as a child. The descendants of Imperial Sugar Refinery workers were ignored during the public engagement around the transition of the refinery to upscale housing in 2011-2015. By engaging public

archives, ephemera, oral tradition (myth, rumor, and story), photos, and government planning documents (maps, design renderings), I unpack the ways in which the pro-growth culture limits the voices of Mayfield Park residents and more recently attempted to silence those speaking on behalf of the 95 bodies discovered nearby.

My arguments here regarding burial sites of the enslaved and public history contribute to research in social and historical geography as well as Black geographies. Drawing from the scholarship of Richard Schein, Owen Dwyer, J.P. Jones, Katherine McKittrick, and Clyde Woods, I situate my analysis of the purported “normative” qualities of the “racial landscapes” of Sugar Land, which inform public planning and heritage within literature on critical and Black geographies (McKittrick 2006; Woods 1995). I draw especially on McKittrick’s concept of “plantation futures” to talk about the role haunting can play in disrupting and advancing the discourse on racial violence in sites of memory, including the former convict leasing living Quarters and burial grounds. This concept highlights the similarities between the prison and plantation noting “the generalized traits of both institutions (displacement, surveillance, and enforced slow death) draw attention to the ongoing racialized workings of spatial violence,” and that this state of death is persistent in a landscape containing the remains of the sugar refinery, plantation, and prison (McKittrick 2016, 956). Throughout the text, I call on McKittrick’s work to revisit the perpetual racial violence and condemnation of Black laboring bodies in Sugar Land’s plantation landscape and how haunting forces the engagement with what Saidiya Hartman’s calls “the afterlives of slavery” (Hartman 1997):

The afterlives of slavery refer to the contemporary condition of Black lives, which are “still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (6). As Hartman points out, even in the wake of emancipation, descendants of enslaved Africans continue to navigate the ongoing perils of transatlantic slavery and their lingering effects on the nature of Black being (McKittrick 2016, 588).

This case study of Mayfield Park or the “Quarters” exposes the cultural continuities of racialized purposeful forgetting of the difficult heritage sustained through the valorization of structures’ use-value over the human embodiment of landscape history. Like Paul Connerton’s (2008a) notion of purposeful forgetting and Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed’s (2012) unremembering, an intentional revision of the past is apparent in maps of the refinery, Mayfield Park, and the site of the Sugar Land 95.

I conclude by discussing the ways the 95’s haunting of public discourse and the landscape catalyzed resistance to this culture of denial and silence in Sugar Land and the county. Laboring Black bodies, reemerge as persons in public history during

the recent haunting of public planning and infrastructure processes. I draw on TL King's concept of Black fungibility, which "recognizes the violence of plantation and its afterlife while simultaneously acknowledging the ongoing capacity for the making and remaking of Black life amid plantation violence" (King 2016, 1023). The ways convict leasing and other forms of labor exploitation make and remake the Sugar Land landscape into ones in which new forms of Black organizing and geographies emerge allows us to read the bodies as more than their past use-value. Instead, the bodies through the fungibility frame enlist us in struggles, on "plantation landscapes" to imagine McKittrick's "plantation futures." Their fungibility lies in the ongoing interruption of development processes and the ways their reemergence from the earth catalyzed "transition, process, and temporal boundarylessness" in the landscape, supplanting school project boundaries with a Black geography (King 2016, 1023). The ways in which Black laboring bodies insinuate themselves into local planning and public history discourse forces recognition and government negotiation with a broader, influential set of stakeholders and supporters than they might have otherwise had. Finally, I discuss the prospect of continuing to upset the practice of racialized purposeful forgetting through this reframing of Black laboring bodies as Black persons haunting. For example, several different factions acting on the 95's behalf tried to assert their agency through ceremonial interruption of burial and funereal practice.

Black Laboring Bodies on Sugar Land's Plantations and Prison Farms

Demand for sugar in Western Europe drove Texas' cultivation of the labor-intensive product (Baptist 2014, 42). Settlers processed sugar in the region since the 1820s, and the business boomed. However, Samuel Williams, owner of the Oakland sugar plantation, struggled to keep operating costs low and turn a profit during the antebellum period. Littleberry Ellis and E.H. Cunningham would later acquire 12,500 acres, which included the Oakland Sugar Plantation and used convict labor. The two business partners, who had served in the Confederate Army, diversified their plantation labor source after emancipation. By 1878, they made a five-year state contract leasing convicts from the state and putting them to work in their sugar cane fields (Dase and Boyd 2004, 5). Soon after that, the Texas Legislature passed [The Black Codes](#) in 1866, which criminalized any freedmen's assertion of personhood, so much so that merely standing in the wrong place at the same time, vagrancy, or failing to be deferential to whites walking on a sidewalk could warrant fines (Crouch 1993). Not having the income to pay the fines, these men would be forced to work off the fee as convict laborers. The state and industry found the arrangement profitable.

Ellis and Cunningham, for example, subleased their convicts to other area plantations while managing 358 convicts in three different work camps in 1880. While they owned separate plantations side by side, they made joint investments. For example, both invested in the Imperial Mill built on the Ellis Plantation in 1883, and by 1896, Cunningham built a \$1.5 million sugar refinery in Sugar Land (Dase and

Boyd 2004, 5). He then sold the refinery to I.H. Kempner and W.T. Eldridge in 1905, who incorporated the Imperial Sugar Company that became the most profitable sugar company in the United States during the early 20th century.

At one time, Sugar Land was known as the “Hell-Hole on the Brazos,” where, “the inmates worked in the wet sugarcane fields, many falling victims to the periodic epidemics of fevers” (Bell 2004). The experience of working Sugar Land’s plantations was dire and unlike white convict leasing victims, Black workers, cut cane and sugar on swampy plantations as seen in Figure 3 (Dase and Boyd 2004, 5). Convicts frequently cut off their limbs to escape the brutality of work in the sugar fields. When leased prisoners died, they were unceremoniously buried near the camps in which the convicts toiled (Blackmon 2009, 92).



Figure 3: Convicts working near Imperial Farm, 1908. Crews would take portable rail car tracks and place them near cane harvesting areas. Cane would then be transported back to the nearest mill. Photo from *Images of America: Sugar Land*, Sugar Land Heritage Foundation. p. 14.

To offset the expense of sugar production, Imperial Sugar would sell 5,235 acres and train cars for transporting harvests and tools to the state for prison farm expansion in 1908, and it was renamed Imperial State Prison Farm. Kempner was averse to the convict leasing system, which ended entirely by 1912 (Dase and Boyd 2004, 8). From 1820 to 1920, sugar cane production went from being sustained through slave labor via convict leasing contracts, followed by state prison farm employees, and finally to a company-town employment structure. The company town would become modern-day Sugar Land where convict leasing victims first

lived in an area called the Quarters that would later become Mayfield Park, a neighborhood adjacent to the industrial site for Brown and Black refinery employees.

The Landscape I Remember

Today, Sugar Land's landscape is identifiable through its master-planned communities comprised of modest to opulent single-family homes and several corporate headquarters. I am sixth-generation Texas, who grew up in this landscape, and recently discussed with a childhood friend what we recalled seeing along Highway 90 near the State Prison Farm. She asked, "Do you remember seeing prisoners working the grounds on the side of the highway when you were younger?" Until she reminded me, I had forgotten the image; I *felt* the memory viscerally. The prompt stimulated recollection of inmates near the highway who seemed close enough to the highway to escape to freedom.

I am also a descendant of the enslaved Africans that Texan's earliest Anglo colonists, known as the Old 300, brought with them to the state. The Old 300 were the original 300 recipients of Mexican land grants in Stephen F. Austin's first colony that became the State of Texas (Figure 4). These slaveholders attained an additional 80 acres for each enslaved person they brought with them to the state. Even after Emancipation, my ancestors remained. They became area landowners and sharecroppers in Fort Bend County. My parents raised me on the eastern side of the county, where middle-class African Americans attracted to the area's good schools and affordable suburban living settled.

According to the ACS 2018 U.S. Census, Fort Bend County has a population of 787,858. The population is almost equally distributed among all racial and ethnic groups making it the most diverse county in the United States. Median household income in the Eastern end of the County is 15 percent lower than the County average, and reliance on subsidized school lunch is growing. Meanwhile, the western half of the county, containing Sugar Land contains upper-income suburbs, necessitated rapid school building. The difficult heritage wasn't apparent to me growing up. Instead, marketing materials promote the county as a successful, growing melting pot. Beautiful trees obscured passers' view of the Mayfield Park community, and the Imperial Sugar Refinery complex was just another industrial site. I passed these two anchors often, but I made no connection between these spaces, those prisoners, or slavery.



Figure 4: Plaque commemorating Anglo settlement of Texas and the first sugar refinery. The plaque is located in front of the Imperial Sugar Refinery. Local history valorizes the Anglo settlers, also known as the Old 300. Photo by Author.

However, Paul Ricoeur admonishes that we “have the power to value the [people who are deemed] useless,” and dream of laboring Black bodies purposefully forgotten (2004, 25). “Lost” history is often embedded in seemingly useless spaces or those buildings we pass daily without recognizing their significance. Revived through the inventive awareness of memories of old buildings, memories, cemeteries, and music, Sugar Land’s past can be understood through work songs and the Blues. The Blues are an oral tradition that can help prompt an awareness of the nexus between cultural production, counternarratives, and resistance against forgetting of oppressed Black bodies (Woods 1995). In the songs of the Blues, Black history is not entirely lost, even in the face of white supremacy of the US nation-state.

Blues artists were incarcerated in Sugar Land and testified to the brutality and terror of the lives of convicts through song. For example, the popular Blues songwriter and singer Huddie Ledbetter—better known as Leadbelly—was incarcerated at the Imperial Prison Farm until his pardon in 1925, where he wrote the well-known song: “The Midnight Special” (Ledbetter 1935). Little Richard, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Van Morrison would later perform the song. The lyrics of this song are as follows:

If you're ever down in Houston,
 Boy, you better walk right.
 And you better not squabble,
 And you better not fight.

Bason and Brock will arrest you.
 Payton and Boone will take you down.
 You can bet your bottom dollar
 That you're Sugar Land bound.

Let the Midnight Special
 Shine the light on me.
 Let the Midnight Special
 Shine the ever-lovin' light on me.

— Huddie Ledbetter (from “Midnight Special”)

Leadbelly, like many African American inmates at Imperial State Prison Farm, looked for the “midnight light” of the train, believing that if the light were to shine into an inmate’s cell, that inmate would receive a pardon within a year. Whether Leadbelly picked up the regionally relevant verse for “Midnight Special” while at Imperial is debatable (Bell 2004). Texas Governor Pat Neff was supposedly so impressed with Leadbelly’s performances that he pardoned Leadbelly. Leadbelly’s music afforded him only temporary freedom as he found himself in one state prison after another, accused of violent crimes that often involved self-defense (Perkinson 2010, 184).

Prison punishment during this period was more than imprisonment; it was physical torture which included light deprivation (Boyd and Duffy 2012; Hunter and Robinson 2018); Perkinson 2010, 173). Ledbetter’s “Midnight Special” indicated that the prison was the last place one wanted to end up. However, Leadbelly’s stories of life in Imperial Prison Farm is conspicuously absent from public spaces in Sugar Land and throughout the Fort Bend County and Texas as well (Yancy 2008, 112). How does such purposeful forgetting shape Black geographies?

Purposeful Forgetting of Black Laboring Bodies in Public History

The county’s social and political institutions instead engage in racialized purposeful forgetting of this difficult heritage (Rose 2016). For mainstream historical organizations, forgetting often takes the form of purposeful destruction (Connerton 2008b, 67). Marie Hernández (2008) writes about an instance of historical repression in *Cemeteries of Ambivalent Desire*. She describes how the George Ranch Historical Park in Fort Bend County hired Carrier Grundy as a consultant to initiate research and interpretation of the African American presence at the site. Funded through the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities, Grundy wrote plays based on her four years of research in the former plantation’s archives. After one performance, the play

was canceled, and George Ranch said her services were no longer needed (Hernández 2008, 106). Why? The play included mention of the Ku Klux Klan and presented the family of a local County leader in a negative light. Hernández writes:

Perhaps the play countered the organization's mission of integrity. J.H.P. Davis's reluctance to transfer the deed of property to Bob Jones was not an act of integrity, nor was the Klan's burning of the local colored school. In making their archives available, the George Ranch organization might have expected that these incidents would be exposed. Either the officials of the George Ranch Historical Park remained oblivious to the past or expected Carrier Gundy to whitewash (literally) her historical research. By banishing the play, they acquiesced to the county's continuing need to forget. (Hernández 2008, 107)

Local leaders pressured the organization to scrub the play of all evidence of racial terror, even though it is obvious that because of the historical periods depicted, Black exploitation and anti-Black violence would have occurred.

The trauma and shame associated with racial violence inhibit progress. As Nell Painter writes in *Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting*, the burden of slavery traumatized Blacks and whites (Painter, Kessler-Harris, and Sklar 1995). The plantations, Imperial Sugar Company, and prison farm manifest multiracial trauma, which inhibited spatial agency among African Americans and psychic or moral agency among whites. This trauma left both parties with a limited set of moral options.

Sugar Land's public history is one laden with the valiant paternalistic efforts of welfare capitalists. Isaac Kempner and William Eldridge had a hand in providing everything from housing to recreational space to employees at the refinery from 1905 until the merger with other sugar businesses in 1989. On Sugar Land's City website, an interview with a former Mayor of Sugar Land exemplifies this paternalistic, mythic distortion of the relationship between labor, the town, and industry embedded in land-use decisions. Former Mayor Bill Little (1961-1964) recalls that,

When Mary and I came to Sugar Land in 1957, it was a segregated community. Today it is known as one of the most diverse communities in the United States. I think we helped in breaking that segregation. In Mayfield Park, as in the rest of Sugar Land, the homes were owned by the sugar company. Black American and Latin American employees lived there. The City realized that the people couldn't live in those houses, which had outdoor privies and a cold water faucet on the back side of the house. One of the things the City did was put a bridge across from Mayfield Park to Main Street so that all kids could get in and out of Mayfield more easily. ("Rebuilding Mayfield Park" 2013)

According to Little, who supported the latest development of the Imperial Sugar site, such conditions allowed for a smooth transition into integration (City of Sugar Land). The myth of the contented slave and good master is alive and retold by government engines to reproduce their power.

These habitual tropes are indicative of the fact that racialized and racist memory is socially constructed and persistent. However, historian David Davis calls for a conscious remembering of planters' terror:

Even the most kindly and humane masters knew that only the threat of violence could force gangs of field hands to work from dawn to dusk, "with the discipline," as one contemporary observer put it, "of a regular trained army." Frequent public floggings reminded every slave of the penalty for inefficient labor, disorderly conduct, or refusal to accept the authority of a superior" (D. B. Davis 2006, 196).

Plantation owners morph overtime into welfare capitalists. Today, developers represent the benevolent leaders in the county. Johnson Development [local planned community developers] and other local master plan community developers are gentlemen covering the puddles of slave and convict blood beneath Sugar Land's dermis with iconography that commemorates the antebellum past. For example, faux Roman columns and elaborate fountains frame the entrance of most subdivisions. Convict cemeteries sit in the middle of new developments like Telfair in Sugar Land. Residents are engaged about the park space, but they are not forced to confront the difficult heritage informing the lives of former prisoners interred in Telfair.

Some measured amount of the historical evidence of Black lives and struggles of difficult heritage is instead evoked in glorified narratives of a white past and prominently displayed in Sugar Land. Subdivision and street names in Sugar Land are nostalgic holdovers from the area's Antebellum Past (Winfrey 1955, 188). Names like "Imperial" Sugar connote not only the popular sugar company but also the dominion such welfare capitalists wielded over land and bodies who worked that land. Sienna Plantation, New Territory, Settlers Way, Colony Bend, Sugar Creek, Oyster Creek Plantation, and Lexington Settlement are names of subdivisions constructed on former plantation land and prison camps. With these names, developers and City governments create an identity for Sugar Land that simultaneously hides and conspicuously displays its exploitive pre- and post-antebellum foundations through advertising, marketing, and signage. These names are part of Sugar Land's perverse ability to emphasize its sweetness, to keep the scaffolding of silence erect, and embrace a guiltless mythic past (Figure 5). While the plantation changes over time and space, in the words of McKittrick, it still

evidences an uneven colonial– racial economy that, while differently articulated across time and place, legalized Black servitude while simultaneously sanctioning Black placelessness and constraint. In the Americas, free labour under bondage thus marked Black working bodies as those ‘with-out’—without legible-Eurocentric history narratives, without land or home, without ownership of self—as this system forcibly secured Black peoples to the geographic mechanics of the plantation economy. (McKittrick 2011, 948)

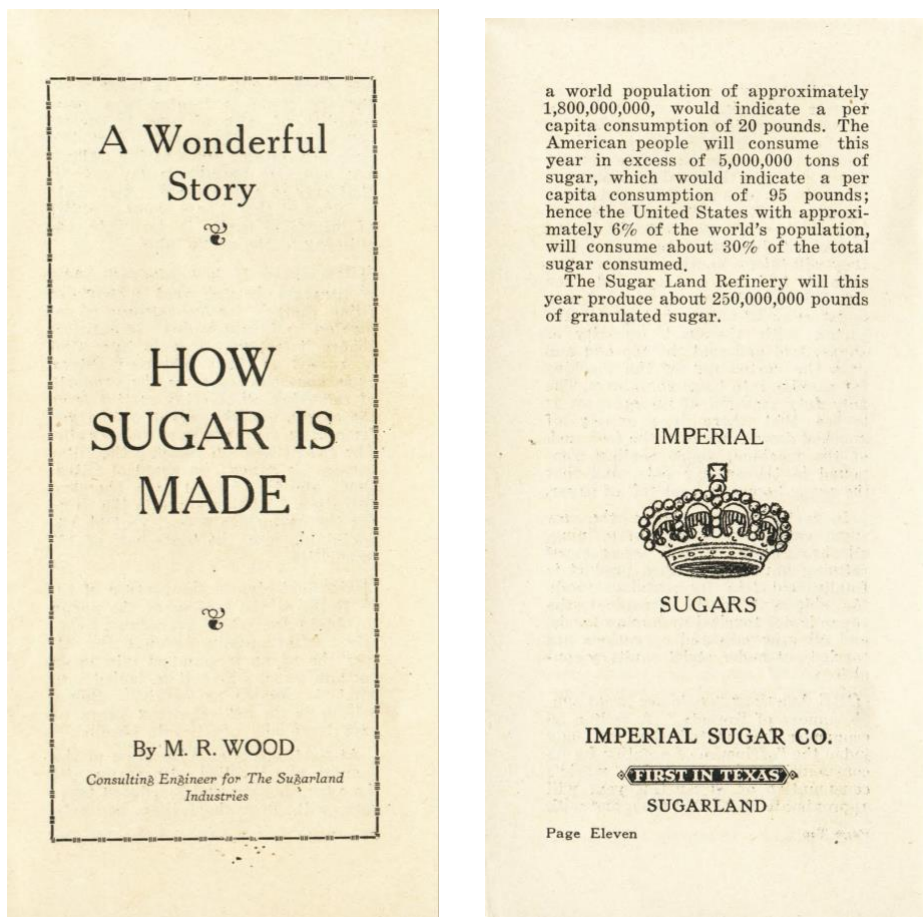


Figure 5: Promotional pamphlet on sugar production. Author MR Wood. The local school for African Americans would be named after Wood, a chemist once employed by sugar mill owner, Cunningham. Photo by Sugar Land Heritage Foundation

In the specific case of Sugar Land, we can see that Black labor, however, persists in the landscape, even when attempts to forget their persistence in the landscape surrounding the refinery, Mayfield Park (Figure 6).



Figure 6: View from the sugar refinery toward Mayfield Park. Photo from within the refinery complex before mixed used development, 2013. The close proximity of the refinery to Mayfield Park neighborhood is apparent. A street is all that separated Mayfield Park homes and the refinery. Photo by Author.

From The Quarters to Mayfield Park

The Quarters were designed as part of the self-contained plant, including the refinery machinery, a company store, and workers. While the entire area was known as the Quarters, convict leasing victims were initially housed in cramped, long barracks. After convict leasing ended in 1912, paid workers transitioned into small homes that faced the refinery (see Figure 7). Living and working space merged for these Black and Brown laborers. Even within the last ten years, the City zoned homes in Mayfield Park as industrial rather than single-family, indicating how much the refinery and convict leasing defined the landscape.

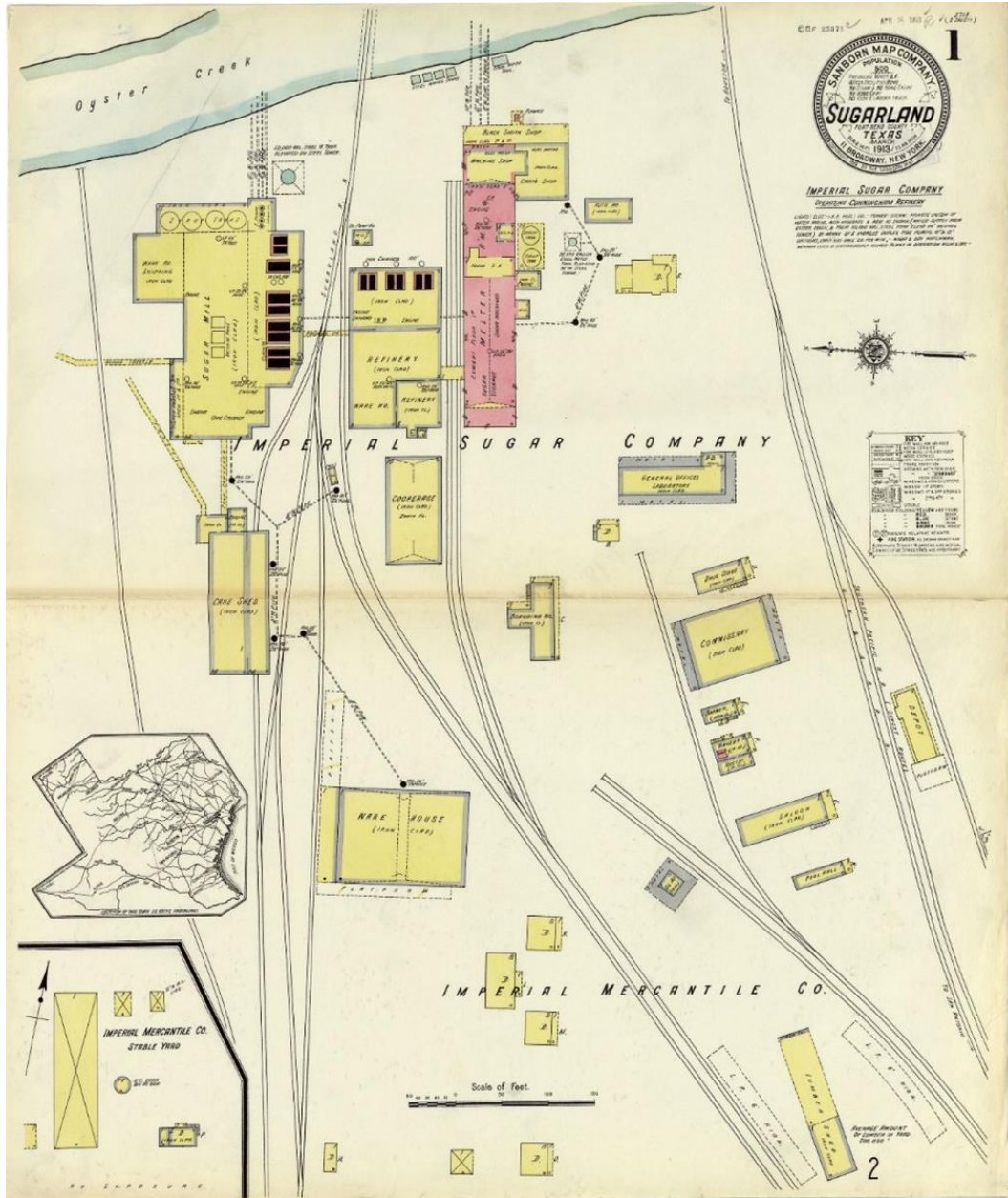


Figure 7: Original "Quarters" era home from 1900 located in Mayfield Park. These homes were the earliest homes for workers. Photo by Robert Allen.

Mayfield advocate R. Bob Allen gleaned an understanding of “the Quarters” from oral histories he conducted with elderly residents:

It is one of the few company towns left. Some of the things they did was they had everything you wanted. Imperial had its own money (only redeemable at the company store). Why was it called “the Quarters?” They had an agreement with the prison system. They would use their labor. When they were released, they were released to the Quarters to work sugar. The State supplied prisoners to help develop sugar. (R. Bob Allen, Realtor, Mayfield Park advocate, member Imperial Redevelopment Committee 2012)

As indicated in the Sanborn map, (Figure 8) the entire refinery complex was a comprehensive site with its own store and designated recreational areas. Mayfield Park is known locally as “the neighborhood designated for minority employees of the Imperial Sugar Company” (Stottlemeyer 2011a). Mayfield Park’s remaining 112 residents embody the memory of “The Quarters,” where Imperial Sugar Refinery laborers and convict leases once lived (Figure 9).



Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

Figure 8: Sugar Refinery Complex, Sanborn Map, 1913. The Sugar Refinery complex was all-inclusive. More than a work site, the complex also contained a pool hall, barbershop, pharmacy, sugar mill, saloon, and commissary. Photo from Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. University of Texas at Austin.



Figure 9: Photo of Mayfield Park circa 1920. Map shows the racialized nature of housing near the refinery complex. Prisoner's Quarters associated with convict leasing are still standing when this photo was taken. The Quarters frame the Mayfield Park community. MR Wood was the school opened for African American children and named for an Imperial Sugar chemist. The school designated for "Hispanic" children is located on the other end of the community. Photo, Sugar Land Heritage Foundation

Though nearly a hundred years removed from chattel slavery, some residents of Mayfield recalled the way, the racialized landscape regulated Black movement and aspirations. Professor Clarence Walker, who lived in Mayfield Park in the 1950s, remembered the specter of enforced servitude that awaited so many Black men in Sugar Land during that time,

Had I remained in Sugar Land I would, like my male peers, have gone to work in the Imperial Sugar Refinery, become a hustler, or joined the military. Because the town had a state prison farm, the omnipresence of Black male prisoners was inescapable, and incarceration seemed to be the main occupation of most Black men (Walker 2004). This futility perpetuated the stoic social structure and discouraged aspirant Black bodies.

Walker adds that,

Besides the teachers and minister, ..., “the other two people in the Black section of the town who satisfied the economic criteria for middle-class status in Sugar Land were the two older Black women who ran the honky-tonks/brothels in the "Quarters." In short, intellectual stimulation in Sugar Land was non-existent. W. E. B. Du Bois aptly described towns like Sugar Land as places of "enforced ignorance” (Walker 2004).

Walker, recalling the sexism, poor education, and the Black community’s hostility toward aspirational behavior in women, had little hope to engage in a life of the mind had he remained in Sugar Land.

Moreover, the “Good Master Myth” infiltrated the unconscious of African American elders as well. Walker was dumbfounded as a youth at how elders in his family,

could never detail the origins and history of segregation. That some white people were prejudiced and life was not fair for Blacks were the only answers you could get out of adults. In retrospect, segregation was treated as if it were somehow normal or naturalized. My older relatives did not like the way they were treated in Texas but seemed to have no expectation that the situation would change (Walker 2004)

This racialized purposeful forgetting infiltrated every facet of Walker’s life. Segregation and normalization of anti-Blackness permeated his community and his home in Mayfield Park. Racialized purposeful forgetting is very explicit in the way the Mayfield Park neighborhood was developed. Large hedges surround the entire community, obscuring the small neighborhood from public view on the side facing away from the refinery. While Imperial Sugar did not force workers to live in Mayfield Park, the neighborhood was the only affordable housing option available in the area. All but one block of seven homes remain near the refinery, while Imperial Sugar built the majority of the homes in the community for employees (Figures 10 and 11).

Developers offered Federal Housing Administration loans for homes in 1954 before the ink was dry on congressional legislation reorganizing the agency and expanding urban renewal to suburban spaces. The Mischer-Harris Company, led by political kingmaker and Houston real estate tycoon Walker Mischer, developed the subdivision. Mischer was responsible for the creation of municipal utility districts, which many point to as the catalyst for the proliferation of suburban development and urban sprawl in Sugar Land and throughout the state (Mack 2005). Mischer Investments went on to develop several of the nearby planned communities, which would create the normative landscape for Houston suburbs.



Figure 10: Margaret Lindsey at 410 Live Oak, Mayfield Park, 2013. The property is located two houses down from the Imperial Refinery site. She recalls two families living on either side when she purchased the home in 1952. The homes marked the beginning of an urban renewal program (even though it was a rural area) meant to upgrade living conditions near the refinery. Photo by Author.



Figure 11: Federal Housing Administration Home, Mayfield Park, Built 1954. This was one of the first Federal Housing Administration in the community built by a Houston developer. The project marked an expansion of urban renewal to suburban spaces. Photo by Author.

Local leaders of the time described the development as an urban renewal initiative that included clearing all of the original homes from the “Quarters” replacing them with modest two, three, and four-bedroom homes. Newspapers described the development as “a 125-homesite subdivision for Sugar Land’s low-income families” (Imperial Crown Newsletter 1954). Original homeowners and their descendants still reside in Mayfield Park. Many remaining residents are elderly descendants relying on reverse mortgages to survive during their remaining years. However, many residents have found that mortgage companies have deemed their homes un-appraisable, perceiving the community as unstable when Imperial Refinery conversion to a mixed-use complex became imminent.

Imperial Sugar Refinery Redevelopment and Revisionist History

After Mischer, site developers like Johnson Development took on projects that hold some of the same symbolic power as the Imperial Sugar Refinery once did within the City and County landscape. Johnson Development’s takeover also prompted concern from two factions: Mayfield Park residents and nearby residents opposing density. The Sugar Land Heritage Foundation is funded in part by local developers and documents the City’s past and gives historic tours. Mayfield Park is conspicuously absent from these tours and local planning documents.

An original plan approved in 2007 included participatory, community-based planning. But, in July 2009, when Johnson Development abruptly took over the project, they led a process many found questionable. Sugar Land City Council passed an ordinance approving Johnson Development’s proposed plan April 2012, and construction began exactly two years later. The development includes a Minor League Ball Park and mixed-use development, a retail space, entertainment, and the most controversial items for residents: 274-unit apartment units ranging from \$1,300-\$4,800 a month, the higher end of which exceeds the metropolitan area fair market rent.

In addition to costs, area residents were concerned about losing their homes to encroaching development and green infrastructure. Homeowners in Mayfield Park expressed concerns about the detention lakes in the new development, which many thought would necessitate the elimination of Mayfield Park homes, even as the City of Sugar Land publicly dispelled that notion. The final map of the General Proposed Plan includes a parkland buffer zone between Mayfield Park residents and Historic District (City of Sugar Land.). Mayfield Park, surrounded by water, has no connectivity to new development with only a small bridge leading in and out. Adding a park added a nice amenity for new residents but further isolated the community with a “buffer zone,” as no efforts were made to increase connectivity to the new development.

The Mayfield Park residents’ three primary concerns were traffic flow, eminent domain, and exclusion from the historic preservation efforts. For example, the two current “Historic Districts” do not include Mayfield Park even though residents like Sally Torres believed her community was historic, “Mayfield Park is

a very historical property. I don't think there's been enough recognition of that, and we talk about preserving the historic part of Sugar Land," Torres said. "We'd like to preserve our family heritage. We have people that worked at the sugar company; we have people who have worked on the crops and Sugar Land's railroad" (Stottlemeyer 2011b). Residents were in many cases former employees of the Refinery. The community had also been the original site of the Quarters, where convict leasing victims had been forced to live. The exclusion of Mayfield Park from the historic district is clear on the Johnson Development Map for the entire 716-acre tract. In Figure 12, the planned uses for the development are marked. While there are two historic districts, the gray, horseshoe-shaped Mayfield Park is not included.

EXHIBIT B-2 PERMITTED USES

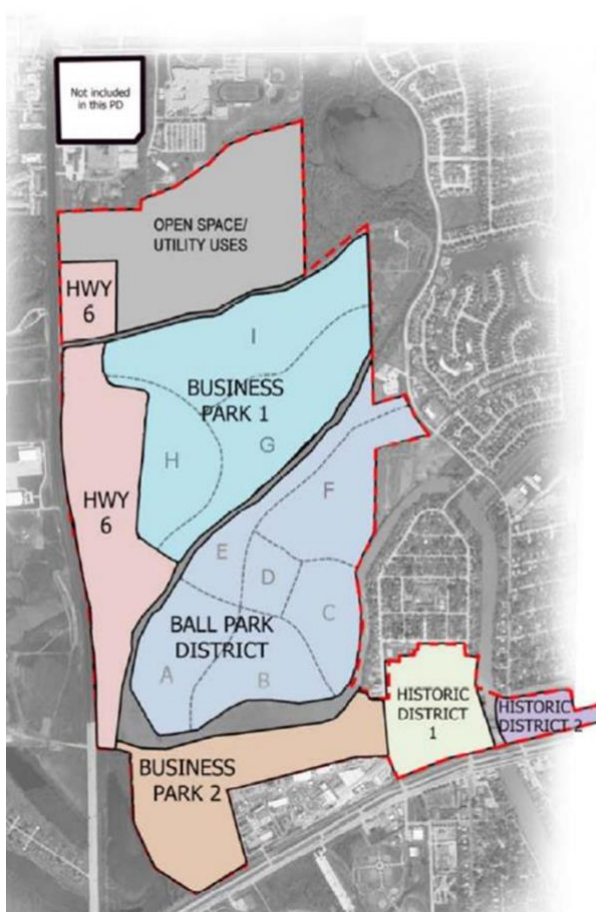


Figure 12: Pre-Project Land Use Map for Imperial Development. In the Sugar Land land use map above, Mayfield Park is the horseshoe-shaped area above Historic District, even though the area is historically significant based on its age, state history, and its relationship to the refinery, and convict leasing.

Those opposed to the development, not only pointed out the inequitable exclusion of Black and Brown history from land use but also densification of

suburban Sugar Land. NIMBYS from more affluent residents in the Historic District nearby opposed the apartments. A coalition then emerged of Mayfield Park residents and others who see the development as inconsistent with the City's 2005 Comprehensive Plan, and which was then amended to accommodate the Imperial Development site (City of Sugar Land.). The coalition lost its battle and appealed to the City Council to require that half of the proposed apartment units be moved to a local major state highway (Highway 6), and away from the Mayfield Park neighborhood to mitigate the traffic caused by the dense development.

Ironically, the advancement of mixed-use development and densification championed by so many "progressive," new urbanisms planners and developers replicated land-use decisions, which habitually subjugated or erased the inconvenient truth of exploited laboring Black bodies. The habit memory of the local development process is not malleable enough to accommodate improvisation and cultivates "inertia in social structures" that may otherwise interrupt these land-use decisions (Connerton 1989, 5). Further, a "plantation logic" (McKittrick 2011, 951) in which developers replace the power of Imperial Sugar Company (closed 2003) undermined any legitimacy of those who opposed the development.

Developers are at the nexus of existing cultural landscapes or places, the marketplace, and political leaders. Hoping to turn a profit in the marketplace, developers prioritized managing inclusivity and engagement in a way that allowed them to avoid difficult heritage and to have to think of the refinery and Mayfield Park (the Quarters) as sites of conscience. Racialized, purposeful forgetting enabled developers to separate, zone, and partition off the difficult from the newly defined adaptive reuse, mixed development site. For example, developers created minor buffers that disconnected Mayfield Park from the Refinery, the Refinery from the nearby prison, and the prison farm from everything. The partitions created by the developers and political leadership, in the form of roads and hedges, also act as sociocultural buffers that continue to facilitate the racialized purposeful forgetting of convict leasing and racial segregation associated with Mayfield Park.

Sugar Land's Mayfield Park holds the dark heritage of land loss, cartographical erasure, structural racism, violence, and economic exploitation as well as cultural memory in folklore, oral tradition describing the experience of living so close to the sugar refinery. The encroachment and urbanization of the landscape have exposed the appropriation of laboring Black bodies while keeping invisible the lengths to which the area's municipalities go to maintain hegemony or keep the scaffolding of myth erect. The mixed-use project was a success for densification advocates, but Black laboring bodies still haunted the Imperial Refinery Re-Development process. The initial development was successful, and more businesses are being added to the imperial "market place" area that encompasses the part of the sugar refinery active since 1843. The complex will soon encompass 290,000 square feet of upscale retail and restaurant space, 90,000 square feet of office space, a 274-unit luxury residential complex and a 185-room, high-end boutique hotel with 10,000

square feet of conference/meeting space and a fitness center (Figure 13) (Johnson Development Corporation 2019).

Because of this growth, the population has increased the pressure for more infrastructure, amenities, and schools. With that, came pressure to build the James Reese Career and Technical Center, \$60 million vocational and professional school. During the construction of that school, convict leasing victims were unearthed.

Haunting: How the Sugar Land 95 Disrupts the Growth Machine

A backhoe operator discovered the first bone February 2018 on land owned by a site Fort Bend ISD was to build the Reese Center. By that summer, 95 sets of remains, aged 14 to 70, were recovered. They were all African American, and their remains indicated that they were malnourished, their bones misshapen from backbreaking, repetitive labor. All of the bodies had been buried in pine boxes between 1878 and 1911.

Three points of contention defined decisions about the “discovered bodies”: who possessed authority and expertise to unearth and identify these bodies, the engagement process, and where the bodies would be reinterred would foster controversy. Local activists were confident that there were remains in multiple campsites around the Sugar Land area. Well in advance of the “discovery,” local activist Reginald Moore, president and founder of the Convict Leasing and Labor Project, contacted the school district in October 2017 to tell them he suspected that bodies might be on the school building site. The District didn’t officially halt the construction of the school until April. From June through August, bodies were exhumed and recorded by archeologists. Students toured, but an official “Sugar Land Task Force” wasn’t created until September. By July, images of chains and other artifacts buried with the bodies were being broadcast internationally (Figure 14).

The Southern convict-leasing system, which some historians have called “slavery by another name,” was laid bare for the world—and relatives of the dead—to see (Blackmon 2009). Well after the bodies were discovered and exhumed, a task force was hastily organized. Yet, even after being organized, those invited to participate were unsure about what authority they had, what time the task force met, and who had a right to speak for the 95. Several groups, scholars, and lay historians arose to exert leadership that would cumulatively keep the district and City of Sugar Land accountable though the issue of who the “representative” for the 95 is remained unresolved.



Figure 13: Marketing material, Imperial complex. The Imperial Sugar refinery buildings have been transformed through an adaptive reuse of the remaining buildings. The Mayfield Park community section of the horse show shaped area is again erased from site planning. Johnson Development Corporation 2019.



Figure 14: Items found when bodies were disinterred, summer 2018. The leg irons and other items found near the bodies confirmed not only that they were prisoners, but also that they died still in chains. Photo by Joe Southern.

In the months since the discovery, Sugar Land consulted with outside groups on the process of reinternment and memorializing the bodies, including Reginald Moore and his Convict Leasing and Labor Project. In September of 2018, local leaders, including Moore, held a teach-in on convict leasing with city and school district official present. Early in the process, Moore wanted the remains reburied at the nearby Old Imperial Prison Farm Cemetery, for which he is already a caretaker. He and others also say money should be allocated for a museum dedicated to convict leasing.

Work toward support for the 95 and their descendant community also came in other ways. The Houston Chapter of the National Black United Front (NBUF), a civil rights group, advocated for the remains to be DNA tested so that reparations may be paid to the biological descendants. Finally, the original archeologists were contested. Scholars who identified as African Diaspora Archeologists noted that no Black archeologists were originally chosen to work with the remains.

There were notable “successes” or ways in which the haunting has informed resistance to purposeful forgetting of the 95. Protests at hearings, task force meetings, teach-ins, and educational panels rose consciousness and attracted press attention, which placed pressure on the City, the County, and school district to act in good faith. The diverse selection of advocates and approaches involved caused the district to return the bodies to the site where they were found. The Texas legislature

passed Texas House Bill 4179, allowing the county to operate and maintain a cemetery. However, the original commitment of \$1 million for DNA testing and reinternment from the state and local government has since been reduced \$284,000, which will only fund reburial, “burial vessels,” markers, and headstones. The Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory at The University of Texas at Austin will conduct DNA testing for no cost. Community volunteers have located the names of 64 individuals who were in the same labor camp. Other leaders think the process should slow down through the school district initiated reburial in January and plan a memorial involving FBISD students by spring 2020.

The discovery of the 95 also brought together the dispersed Black activist voices from across the Greater Houston region. These alliances may serve as foundations for future organizing around historic preservation and advocacy. DNA testing, the amount of money allocated, approach to memorialization, and the location of final internment were all up for debate. However, State Representative Ron Reynolds, historian Sam Collins from Hitchcock in Galveston County, Reginald Moore, and NBUF the urban political and mass action organizing group all united around the principle that the 95 must be properly buried and memorialized (Figure 15). In addition, activists from across the state representing those favoring protests, like those led by Kofi Taharka chairman of the Houston chapter of NBUF, stood on common ground with elected officials, local historians, and even the Fort Bend Historical Commission, thereby creating new alliances.

The unearthing also slowed down the usual plantation logics of capitalist decision-making, because of the widening of the circle of shareholders and interested parties that interrupted the City and school district’s efforts to conclude and minimize public engagement (McKittrick 2011, 951). Haunting Black body remains became, instead, Black persons attached to the Black lives of Sugar Land and the injustices they face. While activists didn’t retail control over the burial process, the haunting mobilized, interrupted public history, slowed processes, and increased the number of stakeholders and protesters that made the 95 and their supporters visible.

These laboring Black bodies’ personhood dominated public discourse in a community customarily consumed by growth. Since the discovery, Reginald Moore and local historian Sam Collins have made presentations at Harvard, Rice, and other universities. The discovery of 95 graves provides an opportunity for residents, descendant communities associated with the interred, and current suburban dwellers to tap into not only social memory but also collective, diasporic memory-work (Inwood and Alderman 2016; Till 2008, 2012; Ricoeur 2004). By identifying historic Black spaces, which illuminate persistent inequalities in Black suburbia—many of which are embedded in formerly rural, antebellum landscapes—cross-class

coalitions and diasporic connections can create a critical mass of activism and impact.



Figure 15: L.to R. Reginald Moore, Founder, Convict Leasing and Labor Project, the author, and Sam Collins, historian and activist, September 2018, Sugar Land, TX. The event honored Moore for his leadership on behalf of the 95. Scholars and activists spoke about their connections to the 95 and Fort Bend county history. Photo by author.

For those African Americans with direct ties to these spaces, such as those in Mayfield Park, engaging with and commemorating discovered bodies can create a space where personal history can be channeled into public history and contemporary discourse on the growing socioeconomic divide in the county. For example, online and offline exhibits, like those created by Rice University students and several think pieces, have popularized a discussion not only of slavery but on mass incarceration (Roberts 2018). The discovery also forced the hand of public historians funded in part by the Imperial Refinery development. Sugar Land's local heritage groups have begun collecting in earnest, ephemera, a large percentage of which is of African American and Latino local history. The stories of workers' contribution to shaping the landscape and on a larger scale, building the county's wealth, are currency in dialogues about the areas of the landscape set aside for memorialization and those set aside for protection.

I would also frame the 95 as having haunted not only a local process but to have led us to revisit related discoveries, like the African Burial Ground. In 1991,

the African Burial Ground, now a national monument in New York City, was discovered during construction of a federal building. Those bodies were uncovered during a cultural resources survey conducted during pre-construction of a new General Services Administration Building in lower Manhattan. 15,000 intact free and enslaved Africans were found buried in a 6.6-acre area. They were just outside the boundary of a forgotten Black settlement in what was then called New Amsterdam. Those archaeologists conferred with the broadly conceived descendant community and reinterred them—on the same spot. Though the school construction project isn't federally funded, Sugar Land, can decide to lead a broader reconciliation and reparative process for African Americans with roots in the area.

As McKittrick writes in "Plantation Futures," the African Burial ground "tells us that the legacy of slavery and the labor of the unfree both shape and are part of the environment we presently inhabit (McKittrick 2013, 2). Those bodies, as reminders play an essential role. They enlist those in the present by integrating the many layers of human history into the current growth and sprawl-based development culture. This haunting introduces enforced mindfulness of the complex impacts of urbanization processes on the cultural landscape beneath planned communities in Sugar land, Texas. The geographies holding the afterlives of slavery provide opportunities to notice that the right to be human carries in it a history of racial encounters and innovative Black diaspora practices that spatialize acts of survival. McKittrick cites Blakey who claims that the cemetery "provided a rare setting in which the enslaved could assert their humanity and respect their own culture' within a context of anti-Black violence. The burial ground also reveals that in the Americas, it is impossible to delink the built environment, the urban, and Blackness" (Blakey 1998, 53; McKittrick 2013).

At the refinery, Mayfield Park, and at the site of the 95's remains convict leasing haunts development. That haunting opens a portal to McKittrick's "plantation futures." In plantation futures, "the plantation is an ongoing locus of anti-Black violence and death that can no longer analytically sustain this violence," even when covered by perfectly manicured, planned communities (McKittrick 2013, 2–3). These fungible laboring Black bodies haunted, warned, interrupted, and organized even though only their bones remained. Their presence made visible the possibility of life amid racial violence. The persistence of this racial violence in cars, homes, and parks haunt us as well, calling us to do our own memory-work and to cling to the personhood in those seen as less significant than the land and structures meant to hold them in bondage. Memory-work can be made tangible through a critical landscape approach to land use and historic preservation.

Conclusion: A Critical Landscape Approach

Understanding the complex landscape of convict leasing makes legible a previously ungeographic Black landscape of agency, creating a cohesive narrative of a Black sense of place amidst the plantation, prison, or company town (McKittrick 2006, x). I argue that what appear to be spontaneous eruptions of difficult heritage is

instead, a long history of Black labor ranging from enslavement to convict leases to factory workers and back to convict leasing. All along, there is a consistent underlying resistance to racialized (white) purposeful forgetting among descendants and even the deceased. The recent discovery complicates public history enough to force a response from FBISD, generate support from the county historical commission, and to make sense of decades of the Black labor history defining the regional landscape.

Black laboring bodies endured the violence of slavery on plantations, and then within the convict leasing system as the agrarian economy transitioned to that of an industrial company town. Those bodies persisted even as the company town still retained McKittrick's notion of plantation logics in its control of Black and Brown laborers' living conditions and violated their sense of neighborhood sovereignty in Mayfield Park from the 1950s to 2015. Efforts to erase Black laboring from the landscape include the destruction of most of the sugar refinery complex and erasure of slavery from the company town's pre-incorporation history. What remains of the sugar refinery complex is adaptively reused and has been converted into an inviting mixed-use space for newcomers. The adaptive reuse of the refinery site, densification, upscale mixed-use and farmers' market further encroach upon and negate the agency of Mayfield Park and its historic role in Sugar Land's cultural landscape. Black laboring bodies return to haunt the development process as a new school is built, and those suffering under "slavery by another name" are discovered (Blackmon 2009).

The normalization of these relationships between space and race makes Sugar Land a racialized landscape in which suppression of memories of exploitation and segregation is the norm (Schein 2003). Even after emancipation, Black freedom and agency remained elusive to many residents as it did throughout the US South. During Reconstruction and the Progressive Era, convicts leased to private companies worked in chains under a constant state terror.

How have and do Black bodies living under such conditions act as agents within the landscape? Agency, explains Katherine McKittrick, consists of the ways in which Black communities—past and present—have used inventive awareness that "allows us to engage with a narrative that locates and draws on Black histories and Black subjects in order to make visible social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic" (McKittrick 2006, x). Examples of this inventive awareness are found in African Diasporic archeological processes of discovery, which result in complex gendered narratives, which disrupt white, dominate public histories (Flewellen 2017, 73; McKittrick 2006, 133; Wilczak et al. 2004, 220; Roberts 2018, 14). The reinvention of these enslaved lives requires that suppressed cultural memories are creatively spatialized at historic sites using various knowledge forms including oral tradition and memory. The affective power of haunting and burial helps cultural resource managers, preservationists, and planners spatialize Black laboring bodies' personhood.

An inventive awareness enables a critical consciousness and perspective on the cultural landscape to emerge, be articulated, and then to contest the normative orientation toward a landscape of erasure. These civic spaces during the struggle for leaving the 95 bodies in place were fraught with tension because Sugar Land officials prioritized managing dissent rather than pursuing the discovery as an opportunity to heal or rethink public history. Deliberately and passively, city governments inhibit productive nostalgia (Blunt 2003), and prevent equitable public discourse and healing.

My recommended interventions in the landscape answer the 95's demand that something must be done. The 95 bodies present an opportunity to engage the public around the future of the broader landscape encompassing not only the school site but also Mayfield Park, remaining buildings from the Quarters, the other convict leasing work camps, and what remains of the Central Unit. The cultural landscape versus individual site perspective presents an unprecedented opportunity to document a complete prison industrial complex through multiple periods of historic significance. Engaging mass incarceration through this comprehensive perspective may be an effective way to make those most removed from local history to consider modern abolitionists' perspective.

The recent excavation of formerly enslaved bodies from a school site presents an occasion to interrupt the normative approach to land use in the area with an engagement process rooted in a blues epistemology that seeks to expose and extinguish the power of the areas' racialized landscape (Woods 1995). The assumed disposal and abstraction of the Black bodies as impediments to progress are consistent with McKittrick's framing of the relationship between prison and Black bodies. She explains that "prison life—past and present—is normalized, cast as the unsurvival of the weakest which hides the brutality of racism by coding community death as all natural and implicit to the 'cycle of life.' In this sense, prison life, and thus human life, moves towards or achieves, prison death through a seemingly natural progression" (McKittrick 2016, 958). Unearthing this difficult heritage can also highlight current class- and race-based inequities that disrupt common sense (Gramsci 1999) and this seemingly natural progression rooted in an idealized notion of Fort Bend as the most diverse county in the United States. Notably, increasingly diverse populations driving growth have exposed countywide tensions around not only where schools are built but for whom and atop whose history.

Commemoration and recognition could help bridge the past and present marginalization of African Americans in carceral landscapes. One form of commemoration would be to establish a third local historic or a federally recognized carceral cultural landscape district. The National Park Service administers the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and it consists of an official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that have been determined to be essential or worthy of preservation based on a Federal rubric. Mayfield Park would have to establish significance by meeting one of four criteria: association with a particular event or notable person, an outstanding architectural or cultural design,

and demonstrate historic integrity linked to the site or property's period (time) of significance. Lastly, the site must yield some vital information about history (National Park Service 2007). Without practitioners, including memory work to capture the complicated relationship between Mayfield Park residents and the now-closed Refinery, such significance will be challenging to establish. The local heritage society can make a difference by broadening the conversation about preservation to be inclusive of the area encompassing the original plantation and work camps along with Mayfield Park. The resulting district, if correctly interpreted would provide a fantastic example of American labor history spanning nearly two centuries, disrupt unsustainable planning, and enables us to forecast abolitionist futures.

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