



HART Program
Houston Action Research Team
Engaged Research Opportunity
Fall 2023

Voices from the Past: Place and Memory in Black Houston

Historic Black Communities (HBCs) in Houston are overwhelmingly underrepresented in local archives, and their importance undervalued within many public history narratives across the city. While some historic communities and neighborhoods are widely regarded as significant and hold state and national historic designation, Freedmen's Town in Fourth Ward and Antioch Baptist Church to name two, other lesser known Black communities in Houston do not have the visibility to influence public discourse in the same way. Pleasantville, Acres Homes, Kashmere Gardens, Clinton Park, Sunnyside, and Independence Heights are just some of the HBCs that have deep histories within the city, but are not as widely discussed. To address these gaps, engaged citizens in active community organizations work collaboratively to preserve heritage sites, conduct research within their local communities, and develop programming for the wider public. Strategic collaborative partnerships can contribute to these efforts and provide wider visibility of the community needs.

Voices from the Past: Place and Memory in Black Houston will provide a platform to highlight HBCs in Houston and broaden the visibility of their histories, community activism and preservation efforts. The Center for Civic Leadership's HART program will partner with ACTS (Achieving Community Tasks Successfully) in Pleasantville and the Descendants of Olivewood to collect oral histories highlighting the historical significance of each community and the current direct-action initiatives these groups are engaged in to strengthen and sustain their neighborhoods. This information will be recorded and disseminated digitally via the organizations' websites and preserved in the Woodson Research Center Special Collections. Eventually the interviews will also be included in the [Black Atlas](#), a research initiative through the Spacial Studies Lab at Rice University that "combines academic research with public-facing mapping techniques." The research clusters developed at the [Spacial Studies Lab](#) are aimed at both scholarly interpretation and community engagement, and therefore make an excellent platform for the oral histories of HBCs to be housed.

The significance of this collaborative research practice cannot be underestimated. Students, faculty and staff from Rice University will practice civic professionalism through the research they will conduct with ACTS and the Descendants of Olivewood. The students will strengthen professional communication, writing and research skills as they work together with the community partners to amplify the voices and experiences of underrepresented Black Houstonians. In this way, the community members and the students will create a learning community to co-produce knowledge and center connections across the city through the medium of digital storytelling.

ACTS and the Descendants of Olivewood will be the two primary community partners. As the University Historian and co-founder of the Black Houston(s) Symposium, Dr. Portia Hopkins will serve as the project's staff advisor. On campus partners include the Center for Civil Leadership, The Woodson Research Center at the Fondren Library and the Spacial Studies Lab.

The team will work to develop relationships and nurture existing community networks to conduct collaborative research that will provide wider visibility for marginalized Black communities histories and initiatives in Houston.

During the Fall semester of the 2023-2024 school year, this Houston Action Research Team will:

- Participate in a historical research methods and oral history workshop
- Conduct oral history interviews with non-profit organization presidents, board members, historical society members, and/ or historic business owners, and descendant community members from historic black communities across Houston
- Edit transcripts of interviews (donate to the community archive & Woodson Research Center)
- Gain foundational knowledge in data collection for digital humanities research
- Deliver a public presentation to community partners and Rice University stakeholders highlighting research findings. Students will also submit a reflection that synthesizes their experience during the semester.

In the Spring semester, students will have the option to present work at Black Houston(s) addressing the symposium theme Place and Memory, a local conference, a symposium, or a public community meeting.

This engaged research opportunity is available to Rice undergraduate students for Fall 2023. An interdisciplinary team of four students, each of whom will bring different, but equally important, skills, knowledge, and experiences, will undertake this project. Team members will each work approximately 8-10 hours per week on this project between **August 28 and December 12** under the guidance of **Dr. Portia Hopkins** and the CCL and a graduate student team advisor, and will receive \$10/hour for their project work. Work time will be flexible, although team members must attend weekly meetings and must coordinate time to work with other team members on the project as needed. Undergraduate students from **all fields of study** with interests and/or skills in at least some of the following areas are encouraged to apply:

a desire to work with community members, learn oral history techniques and digital preservation methods, and utilize digital platforms to disseminate research. Students should have some knowledge of historical research methods and a broad understanding of Houston history. And interest in learning more about geospatial mapping

APPLICATIONS ARE DUE Friday, August 18th at 9am

To inquire or apply contact Dr. Verónica Reyna vr33@rice.edu
For more about Rice's HART Program, visit: <http://ccl.rice.edu/hart>