

Texas to Create District to Celebrate Black History and Culture

By ReShonda Tate | HOUSTON DEFENDER



Seen here are members of Galveston's Central High School Band in 1915. Central High School's Bearcat Band was legendary both in Galveston and throughout the state of Texas. Credit: galvestonhistorycenter.org.

(GALVESTON, TX) - Galveston, nestled south of Houston along the Texas coast, boasts a rich tapestry of African-American history. Not only is it home to Texas' inaugural high school for Black students and the state's first Black Baptist church, but it also claims the distinction of being the birthplace of the first Black heavyweight boxing champion (Jack Johnson).

Yet, perhaps its most renowned legacy is the birth of Juneteenth, a tradition originating on June 19, 1865, when Union Army Gen. Gordon Granger arrived on the island to deliver the long-awaited news of emancipation to enslaved African Americans, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Now, Galveston is embarking on an ambitious endeavor to honor and preserve its African-American heritage by establishing an African-American Cultural Heritage District. The Galveston City Council unanimously voted to allocate \$50,000 towards this initiative, signaling a commitment to highlight the city's vibrant Black history while also leveraging it for tourism and economic growth.

Sharon Lewis, a city council member and Galveston native with personal ties to the era of segregation, emphasized the pivotal role of African Americans in shaping the city's identity. She underscored the necessity of acknowledging their contributions and preserving their legacy for future generations.

Antoinette Lynch, Galveston's arts and culture coordinator leading the effort, outlined the proposed boundaries for the heritage district, encompassing significant historical landmarks such as Jack Johnson Park, Avenue L Missionary Baptist Church, and the Old Central Cultural Center. Lynch detailed plans for community engagement, including roundtable discussions and online feedback mechanisms, to shape the district's boundaries and determine the appropriate designation, be it a historic district or a cultural arts district.

The establishment of an African-American Cultural Heritage District not only honors the past but also paves the way for future prosperity. Lynch highlighted the potential for increased funding opportunities through federal and state grants, citing the success of Downtown Galveston's cultural arts district designation.

Galveston Mayor Craig Brown expressed optimism about the district's impact, envisioning it as a focal point for future developments that amplify the African-American community's local and national significance. As the city seeks input from residents and stakeholders in the coming months, there is palpable excitement about the prospect of celebrating Galveston's diverse heritage and laying the groundwork for a thriving future.

The Racial Realities of Hurricane Displacement

by Willy Blackmore | WORD IN BLACK

(CLIMATE JUSTICE) - Even with the ever-lengthening wildfire season in the West, hurricanes are the leading cause of displacement due to natural disasters in the United States. That's according to new data published only for the second time by the Census Bureau. It provides rare insight into how disasters affect American lives since it added questions about displacement to its Household Pulse Survey.

In total, 2.5 million people had to leave their homes in 2023, and with hurricanes in the Southeast forcing the bulk of those displacement, the people having to flee are disproportionately Black and Latinx, and people who are poor end up being displaced for longer periods of time.

Both the Census Bureau and analysts note that there are limitations to the data, which is gathered through a voluntary survey, and leaves phrases like "natural disaster" and "displacement" broadly defined. But having any large-scale sense of who goes where after major disasters is both new and incredibly useful. Displacement "has a really big cumulative cost that's hard to capture," Andrew Rumbach of the Urban Institute told the New York Times. "This, at least, gives us a snapshot of that."

When it comes to Black folks, that snapshot shows what was already logical to assume. Just consider all that we already know about the effects of hurricanes on Black Americans: even within Southeastern states, where the bulk of the storms that make landfall in the U.S. hit, Black residents are nearly twice as likely to experience hurricanes than non-Black residents in the very same storm-prone region.

Black people tend to be poorer on average than the overall population, and when it comes to housing, they are more likely to rent rather than own — both of which increase the likelihood of being displaced, and being displaced for longer in the event of a storm. The new Census data also showed that Black and Latinx people who are LGBTQ



Victims of Hurricane Katrina. Courtesy/Austin K./Megi

were displaced at an even higher rate, according to the New York Times.

An analysis of the 2022 Household Pulse data, the first to include natural disaster questions, from the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that Black and Latinx households were twice as likely to be displaced after a disaster. NLIHC also noted that "Black, non-Latino households and Latino households were more likely to be displaced, regardless of whether they were renters or homeowners, compared to white, non-Latino households."

The new survey suggests that many displaced respondents in 2023 struggled during their time away from home, with more than a third reporting that they dealt with hunger in the month following the storm. And over half said they were contacted by someone who seemed like they were trying to defraud them.

With climate change making hurricanes both large and more frequent, it's likely that the number of people displaced by hurricanes (as well as wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters) in the coming years — and the racial disparities may even grow as storms hit the areas where Black people live even harder.

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