

City Council Committee on Rules will hold a public hearing on June 15, 2021. The agenda items include amending Chapter 14-1000 of the Philadelphia Code, the historic preservation ordinance, “to establish a temporary demolition moratorium with respect to properties in the area of Christian Street between Broad and 20th Streets.” For what it’s worth, I will not offer public testimony. I do not want to give legitimacy to the exploitation of Black history to preserve the historic fabric of blocks from which African Americans have been displaced.

The first enslaved Africans were brought to Philadelphia in 1639. The first Main Street for the Black elite, North 5th Street above Market Street, dates back to the 18th century. Residents included James Dexter, a founding member of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. Artifacts from the vibrant community of free Blacks were discovered while the site was being excavated for the National Constitution Center. The period of significance of the proposed “Black-themed” Christian Street historic district is 20 years (1920s to 1940s). Three hundred years of Black history are erased.

Philadelphia was the center of organized resistance to slavery. The office of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society to which Henry “Box” Brown was delivered to freedom was located at 31 N. 5th Street. The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Free Produce Market were located on North 5th Street. The Free Produce Movement was a boycott of goods produced with slave labor.

Properties associated with William Still are still standing on Lombard and South Streets. W.E.B. Du Bois’ landmark sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, focused on the Seventh Ward. Yet it is proposed that six blocks in the most gentrified neighborhood should be designated Philadelphia’s first “Black-themed” historic district.

Months will be spent researching residents of Christian Street between Broad and 20th Streets to try to meet the criterion of historical or cultural significance. I lead walking tours in the area. Julian Abele Residence and First African Baptist Church are the only properties listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. If the notables of “Doctors Row” are central to Philadelphia’s Black identity, why are they largely unknown to Black Philadelphians?

Of the 440 properties listed in the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia’s Inventory of African American Historic Sites, eight are located on Christian Street, including St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church whose Black members told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* they have been relegated to “second-class parishioners.”

The Bessie Smith House is listed in the inventory. Smith’s honors include a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and a plaque on Philly’s Walk of Fame. Of the 13 African Americans with Philadelphia roots depicted on U.S. postage stamps only one lived on Christian Street. The Empress of the Blues lived at 1319 Christian Street. The property is not included in the proposed “Black-themed” historic district because the 1300 block of Christian Street is not lined with elegant townhouses.

The significance of the notables of “Doctors Row” pales in comparison to the history makers of North 5th, Lombard and South Streets – and Washington Square West.

African American historic sites on Lombard Street between Broad and 20th Streets include Dunbar/Lincoln Theater; Douglass Hotel (listed on Philadelphia Register of Historic Places; Sidney Bechet, John Coltrane and Grover Washington Jr. recorded live albums here);

Citizens Republican Club; Wesley AME Zion Church (listed on National Register of Historic Places); People's Savings Bank of Philadelphia (first bank managed by African Americans); Frederick Douglass Hospital; Thomas Durham School (listed on National Register of Historic Places); Cinderella Inn/Apex Beauty School (listed on Philadelphia Register of Historic Places); Octavius V. Catto Public School; Frances Plaza Apartments; and Morris Tavern.

African American historic sites on South Street between Broad and 20th Streets include jazz clubs listed in the iconic travel guide, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*; Process Junior's Barber Shop; Royal Theater (listed on Philadelphia Register of Historic Places); and Citizens and Southern Bank. Mae's Millinery Shop was located at 1620 South Street. The National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) has a gallery commemorating Mae Reeves, the first African American woman to own a business on the then-thriving Black Main Street. Reeves' clients included Marian Anderson, Ella Fitzgerald and Lena Horne.

Decades before "Doctors Row," the Black elite lived in the area now known as Washington Square West. Robert Purvis, cofounder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, lived at 838 Lombard Street. At the time of his death on July 14, 1902, William Still lived at 244 S. 12th Street. In his obituary, The New York Times wrote the Father of the Underground Railroad "leaves a fortune estimated at between \$750,000 and \$1,000,000."

Abolitionist Henry Minton lived at 204 S. 12th Street. Minton, Thomas J. Dorsey (1231 Locust Street) and Henry Jones (250 S. 12th Street) are Du Bois' triumvirate of elite caterers who "took complete leadership of the bewildered group of Negroes, and led them steadily on to a degree of affluence, culture and respect such as has probably never been surpassed in the history of the Negro in America." A musical about the Minton family will premiere at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC in 2022.

Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller was a trailblazing sculptor and the first African American woman to receive a federal art commission. Du Bois invited her to assemble dioramas for the "Exhibit of American Negroes" at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris. Fuller's sculpture *Ethiopia* is in the collection of the NMAAHC. She is featured in the PBS documentary, "Unladylike 2020."

Fuller's maternal grandfather was caterer Henry Jones. Her father was a prosperous barber who owned several businesses. Her mother was an accomplished hairdresser with a primarily wealthy, white clientele. Fuller presented a show at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1928. The family home was located at 254 S. 12th Street.

Richard Allen and Mother Bethel AME Church, a National Historic Landmark and National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom site, have been central to Philadelphia's Black identity since 1794. Philadelphia would rightly be a national laughingstock if a "Black-themed" historic district were designated that does not include, *i.a.*, James Forten, Absalom Jones, Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Marian Anderson, Billie Holiday, John Coltrane, and properties associated with the Underground Railroad.

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