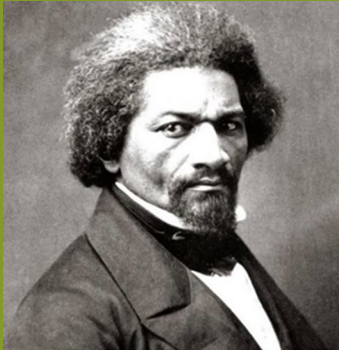


BLACK HISTORY

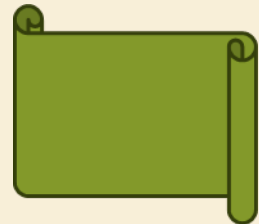
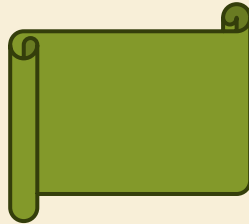
Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery located at 1421 Wilkes Street in Alexandria, VA. It dates back to the early 1800s. Black residents of Alexandria named this burial ground after the great activist Frederick Douglass soon after he died in 1895. Well over 2000 African Americans are buried here with several hundred born into slavery and then freed. Two hundred are children, some who were stillborn and some who only lived very short lives. Records indicate that of 2000 buried here, approximately six to seven hundred headstones are present.



FREDERICK DOUGLASS MEMORIAL CEMETERY NEWSLETTER

Vol.1 Issue No. 4 BLACK HISTORY SPECIAL

Welcome to the Friends of Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery newsletter. This quarterly newsletter will inform all stakeholders, descendants, and the public about the scope of work and ongoing progress at the cemetery.



FOLKLORE & ANCESTORS

What is an ancestor? Our ancestors are the people who came before us and now reach out from the distant past. We honor them by remembering their lives and history. Sharing their stories and how they dealt with the human condition. The oral history and traditions they passed on create the folklore we share to sustain our customs and heritage.



TRIBUTE



Mr. Robert “*Old Folks*” Dawkins

(You will be missed)

Born in Alexandria, Virginia on November 9th, 1940. Mr. Robert Dawkins was a visionary and what many people have come to realize as a Historian. He had a gift for wanting to preserve the rich and untapped history of African Americans here in Alexandria. He loved to read and always would share important books and writings with all who would listen. His vision was to highlight, acknowledge, and showcase the impact of those who had paved the way for so many local, international, and statewide in Education, Music, Politics, Science, and Athletics. He always stated that “The People who were selected and placed on the Alexandria African American Wall of Fame were those who succeeded against all odds.” Mr. Dawkins started several impactful programs during his lifetime and due to that there were so many this writer will just name a few that help the growth and development of our Youth and Adults here in Alexandria.

From his time working in recreation, where he would encourage our young people to take up tennis or take them on out-of-town trips to experience the Penn relays or the NBA headquarters in New Jersey or put together track and field events. His wisdom will be missed yet carried on by

so many. One of the most successful programs that he helped to start with the late great Hall of Fame Coach John Thompson (Georgetown) was the Urban Coalition which showcased the talents of the best high school and pro players from the DMV area and also the whole North and South corridor of the East coast.

In the mid-90s he started the Hoop Academy program which allowed our local youth to see and experience how well education would play in their young lives. He then added another part to the Hoop Academy, and it became the Hoop Academy International. This program saw players from around the world come to Alexandria and get a better understanding of their purpose in life as well. Mr. Dawkins again said he “would like to leave a Footprint for others coming behind.” He traveled through several states just to see how he would put one of his best works forward which he did by putting together The Alexandria African American Hall of Fame who website you will find inside this newsletter on one of the next pages. (Please visit). There are so many contributions that Mr. Robert “Old Folks” Dawkins has made that his impact or as he would say “His footprint” will last a lifetime.

I am Michael Johnson, one of the “Kings whom he helped to mold and encouraged me to look beyond myself and to serve those that are coming behind me for our History to Live On”. I am a descendant and co-author of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery located in Alexandria Virginia please make time and look at the work we are doing to preserve our Heritage. ‘God never gives you a dream that matches your budget, he’s not checking your bank account but he’s checking your Heart.’

By: Michael Johnson



The Hope of Remembrance

By: Folklorist William Patterson

My name is William Patterson. I am a second-generation Washingtonian. I live in DC and enjoy discovering the Nation's Capital undiscovered historical and cultural aspects. I went to the University of the District of Columbia as an undergraduate and majored in Urban Sustainability. I am an environmentalist and live by the creed of preservation, conservation, and minimalism towards finite resources.

I have a master's degree from George Mason University in Folklore. Folklore encompasses many different fabrics of culture. The practice of a folklorist is the sustainability of relevant cultural expression and behavior. I aim to combine the two disciplines as Folklore and Environmental Sustainability are interdisciplinary and cannot exist without each other.

As a Folklorist, it is my duty to document and describe relevant cultural practices. Relevant cultural practices are cultural expressions (Lore) created by people (Folk) that still exist and have not ceased. Many people understand this to be what is called folklore. There are oral traditions and culturally expressive forms passed on by various communities and groups. These cultural expressions help us navigate through the twists and turns in our life journey. Many consider

cemeteries as resting places for loved ones, friends, family, and acquaintances. The deceased secures a final resting place of peace for the soul that probably experienced certain hardships from the human condition.

In harmed communities, this is a place to go and empathize with the life cycle. In most cemeteries in America, there is green grass, bushes, trees, flowers grown and brought there by the griever, and usually a small, medium, or large tombstone. The custom of visiting cemeteries can be viewed through two lenses that intertwine as one to bring relief, comfort, and a spiritual connection to the people left behind who care for the departed soul.

The first is tangible culture, something you can touch and see. This would be the tombstone created to leave a mark and often a brief description of their timeline, and sometimes words written in adoration and remembrance of the individual. In the afterlife, their old, restless hearts run towards tranquility. The tombstone is considered material culture, a relic that gives the person an anchor to the person whose body is beneath the monument, but the spirit has departed the remains. The second is intangible culture. This is the ritual of visiting the grave site on anniversaries like birthdays, the day they died or were buried.

Why is this a tangible culture? Because you cannot see or touch it because it is invisible and untouchable, but you can feel and sense it. It helps the mourner grieve the loss and stay connected to the essence of the person they cared for by having a place that matters to commune with them. The cultural practice of visiting a cemetery and spending time with the deceased is not only a ritual and ceremony that goes back to the beginning of human existence. Equally important is its function to the person or group participating in this cultural behavior. It is a way to continue oral historical traditions such as sacred ceremonies performed by First Nation people and African Americans who have ceremonies to remember the dead before laying their remains so as not to be disturbed in the earth they were born on. The culture I am describing is called folklore, which is the passing on of oral traditions to the next generation. This means the verbal transmission of the previous generation to the next of ceremonies, rituals, habits, and knowledge that demonstrate expressive culture through history, people, groups, and communities.

These customs connect the physical body with the spiritual and create transcending human experiences with moments that nurture us to maintain sanity and a drive to push forward and continue to live.

Lastly, the person who carved the tombstone is a stone mason who must learn their craft from a master stone mason orally. Depending on their work, the one who by hand makes the tombstone aesthetically pleasing with a human inscription to further push the oral traditions and history of folklore for others to resonate with and possibly have the hope of remembrance. The craft of stone masonry is therapeutic for the creator and the person who uses the tombstone to remember. It is another vital cultural expression that helps us accept and deal with the human condition.



Douglass Cemetery the Reflective Mirror

By: William Patterson

Douglass's cemetery was established due to segregation, which did not permit African Americans to be buried in the same burial sites as White Alexandrians. This an outward sign that even in death, there is a hierarchy, and living or dead African Americans were considered inferior. The cemetery was the final resting place for family members to be buried near each other, and it is estimated that 2,000 people are buried there, but only 700 have grave markings.

The descendants of the ancestors buried in Douglass cemetery are now utilizing their combined resources with the support of the City of Alexandria and the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) to rectify the neglect of the cemetery and right the wrongs of many of the injustices these African Americans experienced while living.

This past year the Douglass Community History Initiative was launched to preserve and showcase the history of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery. This initiative is a collaboration between City staff and a Descendant Advisory Group, made up of representatives from the Friends of Douglass group. Douglass cemetery was constructed in 1895 when the orator, abolitionist, violinist, and self-taught French speaker Fredrick Douglass died. In remembrance of his accomplishments and duty to America and African Americans, the cemetery was named after him, and a monument was erected to mark the community anchor of African American contributions and relevance in Alexandria, Virginia. Above all, we must conceptualize the cemetery name and the monument built inside it.

Frederick Douglass, once an enslaved man, said many things that painted a clear picture of not only the past but the present-day realities of the gap that remains in race relations in America. Federick Douglass had this to say: “Though the colored man is no longer subject to be bought and sold, he is still surrounded by an adverse sentiment which fetters all his movements. In his downward course, he meets with no resistance, but his course upward is resented and resisted at every step of his progress. If he comes in ignorance, rags, and wretchedness, he conforms to the popular belief of his character, and in that character he is welcome. But if he shall come as a gentleman, a scholar, and a statesman, he is hailed as a contradiction to the national faith concerning his race, and his coming is resented as impudence.

In one case he may provoke contempt and derision, but in the other, he is an affront to pride and provokes malice. Let him do what he will, there is at present, therefore, no escape for him. The color line meets him everywhere, and in a measure shuts him out from all respectable and profitable trades and callings.”

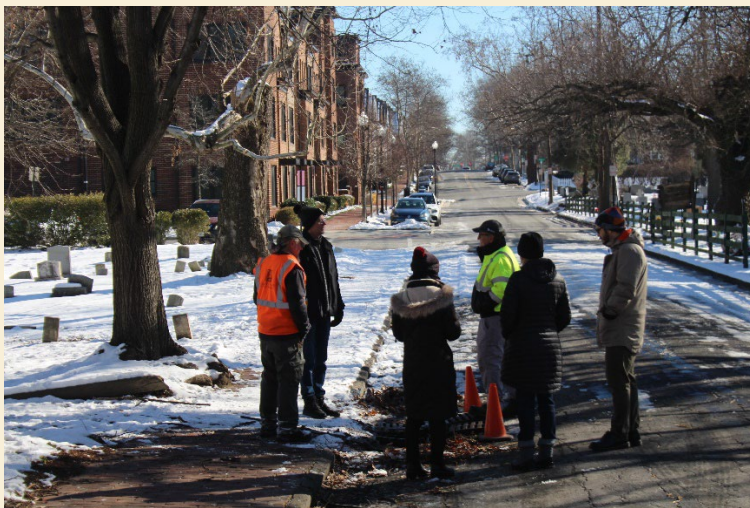
Systemic Racism in America produces visible and invisible disparities for African Americans and other minorities. In the case of Douglass Cemetery, history shows you how an African American cemetery goes unkept. While the neighboring White cemeteries right next to it are in

pristine condition. However, through death, we observe the unfortunate mirrors of the effects of these racial disparities.

The cemetery is right next to a condominium built in the 1990's which might be the reason for the over-flooding in the cemetery. There needs to be drainage for kitchens and bathrooms and these amenities would take precedence over the care of a Black cemetery. Many of the people who live there walk their dogs in the cemetery and do not pick up their pet poop. An outward sign of disrespect for the deceased and African American culture. The goal of the Initiative is to center descendants throughout the process by collaborating with the Descendant Advisory Group to inform every aspect of the Initiative.

City staff are providing resources and support to complete oral history recordings, collect material objects, and use the collections to showcase the history of Douglass to the public. While this Initiative continues to be worked on, the city is also working on the physical restoration and preservation of Douglass. Historic preservation is vital to maintaining the structures that convey the material culture of the past. It is a significant marker for the communities and people who lived there.

Restoration of the Cemetery Started





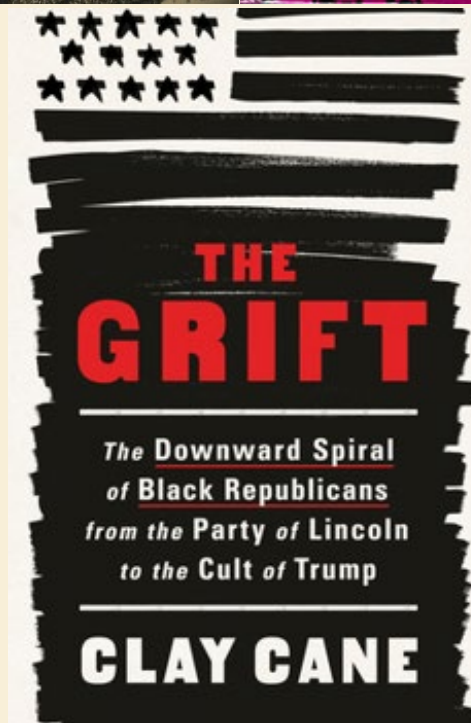
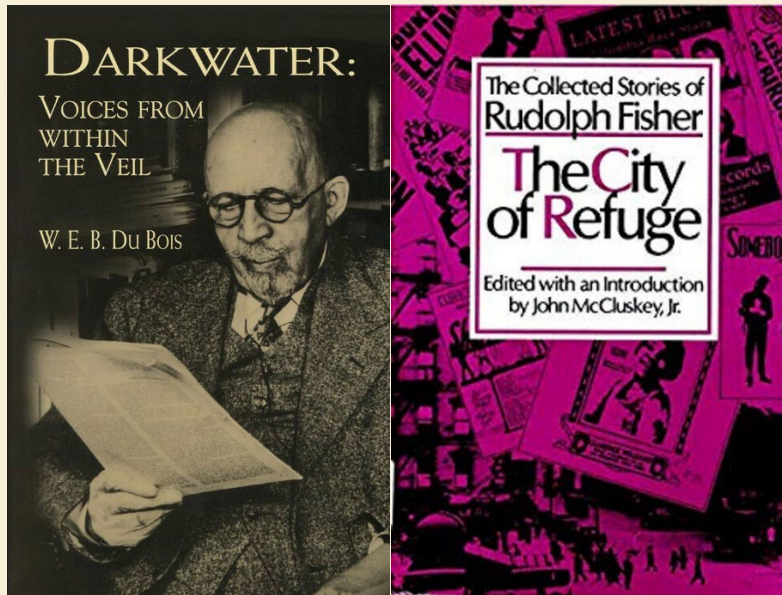
Archaeologists are working to restore the integrity of the land and identify the flooding issue at the cemetery from poor drainage. The work is progressing as the restoration is in full motion.



Photo Credit: Micheal Johnson

In Honor of Black History Month

To celebrate Black History month these are the book recommendations.



REFERENCES

Alexandria African American Hall of Fame

(<https://www.alexandriafricanamericanhalloffame.org/>)

Alexandria Virginia Historic Sites

(<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic-sites/douglass-memorial-cemetery>)

Douglass Memorial Cemetery

(<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic-sites/douglass-memorial-cemetery>)

The Fight to Preserve Douglass Cemetery

(<https://alextimes.com/2021/11/the-fight-to-preserve-douglass-cemetery/>)

Social Responsibility Group

(<https://www.socialresponsibilitygroup.org/>)

The Black Cemetery Network

(<https://blackcemeterynetwork.org/>)

Concerns Growing Over Flooding at Historically Black Cemetery in Alexandria

(<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/virginia/flooding-at-historically-black-cemetery-in-old-town-remains-an-ongoing-issue-for-families-and-neighbors/65-02163cf6-5098-4fe4-9b01-f998bf91384b>)

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