

**1908 SPRINGFIELD RACE RIOT
SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY**

NOVEMBER 2022

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OVERVIEW OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998 requires that each special resource study “shall be prepared with appropriate opportunity for public involvement, including at least one public meeting in the vicinity of the study, and after reasonable efforts to notify potential affected landowners and State and local governments.” The National Park Service (NPS) made a diligent effort to engage interested and affected individuals, groups, and agencies during the preparation of this study through an in person public meeting and public comment period.

The National Park Service, in partnership with the Springfield NAACP, the City of Springfield, and Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS), planned and conducted outreach to the public to share information about the special resource study process and collect information that would inform the findings of the study. The National Park Service solicited public input on a variety of topics, including current management of the study area and ideas for future resource protection and visitor enjoyment. This civic engagement also helped the National Park Service assess the level of local support for adding the site to the national park system.

NOTIFYING THE PUBLIC

The National Park Service initiated the special resource study of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois, in spring 2022. In the initial steps of the process, the study team gathered information regarding the site and met with key stakeholders. In August 2022, the study team initiated a civic engagement process to inform the special resource study. During the civic engagement process, the National Park Service solicited feedback from the public through a newsletter, the project website, and an in-person public meeting, which was advertised through the project website and a press release in local and regional media. A project website was created on the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/springfieldsrs>) to share project updates, provide information regarding the public meeting, and collect public comments.

The study team coordinated with the NAACP, the City of Springfield, and Hospital Sisters Health System to share notice of the public meeting and encourage the public to respond during the public comment period. In addition to the public meeting, the National Park Service conducted site visits of the study area, where individuals and organizations participated in and supported the process.

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

The official public comment period opened on August 3, 2022, and closed on September 9, 2022. The study team hosted one in-person public meeting on August 10, 2022, at the NAACP office in Springfield, Illinois, which was well attended by representatives from several local community organizations. The meeting was recorded by the City of Springfield and made available to the public on the project website, the city’s public access television channel, and at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqQg9G3zcDo>. The National Park Service shared a

presentation at the public meeting to share information about the purpose and process of a special resource study, provide an overview of the criteria the National Park Service applies when conducting special resource studies, and seek public feedback.

Approximately 100 people attended the public meeting hosted at the Springfield NAACP offices. The meeting was well attended by the public, representatives of elected officials, representatives of local community organizations, NAACP members, the mayor of Springfield, Hospital Sisters Health System, and the great-grandson of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, all expressing strong support for the special resource study and designating a new national park unit. Organizations represented included the Springfield Urban League; the American Civil Liberties Union; Prince Hall Mason of Central Lodge #3; Black Lives Matter Springfield; the Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum; Route 66 History; the Jewish Federation of Springfield; the Sierra Club; and fraternity alumni from Kappa Alpha Psi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Alpha Phi Alpha, among others.

During the meeting, private citizens and organizations shared personal stories and reflections, including when they learned about the site and the 1908 Springfield Race Riot and its impact on them. Meeting attendees urged one another to start a dialogue in support of healing and remembering the victims of the riot. The National Park Service received questions and comments from meeting attendees and addressed questions and comments in real time. Meeting attendees also urged the National Park Service to preserve the site because of its importance in encompassing diverse stories. Attendees were encouraged to submit their comments to the project's PEPC site. As a result of civic engagement, several news stories and articles were published, all demonstrating a level of support for the special resource study and its potential designation as a national park system unit.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The National Park Service sought feedback on the special resource study by asking the public to answer the following six questions that were designed to gauge the level of public support. The questions were listed in the newsletter and displayed during the public meeting. The questions were as follows:

1. What is your vision for preserving the 1908 Springfield Race Riot archeological site and how would you like to see the site managed?
2. What types of activities and experiences would you want to see as part of the site into the future?
3. Do you have any ideas or concerns that the National Park Service should be aware of and/or address in the study process?
4. What objects, buildings, remaining features, values and stories do you believe are most important at this site (or related to the riot but not at this site) and why?
5. Do you support or oppose a potential national park unit designation?
6. Do you have any other ideas or comments you would like to share with us?

During the public comment period, the National Park Service received approximately 5,500 comments from individuals or organizations on the special resource study. Approximately 80 correspondences were received through the online platform and by email. The study team received 1,096 letters from the Sierra Club expressing support for a potential designation and approximately 4,300 signatures on a letter of support for designation received from individuals identifying as Black clergy and Black church leaders across the nation. Several of the religious organizations providing comment letters expressed strong support on behalf of their parishioners or members. The list below captures the organizations that submitted comments in support of the study and a potential designation of a new national park unit.

Property Owners

- City of Springfield, Office of the City Council
- Hospital Sisters Health System, the parent company of St. John's Hospital

Stakeholders

- National NAACP
- Illinois NAACP State Conference
- Hanson Professional Services Inc.
- Lincoln Presidential Foundation
- Springfield Urban League Inc.

Church and Religious Organizations

- Grace International Outreach Church
- Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
- American Baptist General Convention of Texas
- Alabama State Missionary Baptist Convention, Inc.
- The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, North Eastern Episcopal District
- Church of God in Christ, Inc.
- Black Presbyterian Caucus
- California State Baptist Convention, Inc.
- Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
- Emmanuel Temple Church of God in Christ
- Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention

- Green Chalice Christian Church
- Greenfaith
- Baptist General State Convention of Illinois, Inc.
- The United Baptist Missionary Convention and Auxiliaries of the State of Maryland Inc.
- The Midwest Episcopal District
- National Council of Churches
- The Nation's Mosque
- North Carolina Council of Churches
- General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina
- The National Religious Partnership for the Environment
- The Pennsylvania Baptist State Convention
- Progressive Missionary and Educational Baptist State Convention of Florida, Inc.
- Florida Council of Churches
- Sisters of Mercy
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Temple Hesed
- Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
- Texas State Missionary Baptist Convention, Inc.
- Wisconsin General Baptist State Convention, Inc.
- Lutherans Restoring Creation

Other Interested Organizations

- Sierra Club
- Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Mother Jones Foundation
- United States Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites

- League of Conservation Voters
- Illinois Environmental Council
- Robert Moore and Associate Police Consultants and Online Book Sales
- GreenLatinos
- Eta Psi Sigma

PUBLIC OPINIONS, PERCEPTIONS, AND VALUES

The following is a brief overview of respondent comments, divided into five main topics based on the scoping questions above.

Support for NPS Designation

Support for the study and potentially designating the site as a national park unit was almost unanimous. Commenters mentioned that the local community has effectively encouraged protecting the site but recognized that the National Park Service would ensure its preservation into perpetuity and protect the important story of the site. Commenters described the potential efficiency of NPS management of the site when combined with the nearby Lincoln Home National Historic Site. Commenters also shared the contributions of the local community and organizations that currently protect the site and tell its story and mentioned several partnership opportunities.

Several commenters supported preserving the site as a monument to commemorate the 1908 Springfield Race Riot, the founding of the NAACP, and the events that occurred during the riot. Respondents mentioned that the site shows both the story of trauma and pain and a story of hope with the founding of the NAACP. Commenters shared how creating a dialogue and educating the public about the riot and its aftermath would acknowledge its role in American history and be a step toward healing for both the local community and the nation. Commenters shared the importance of the NAACP's founding, specifically, how Ida B. Wells-Barnett's advocacy for racial justice connects to the 1919 Red Summer and the Tulsa Race Massacre, among others.

Commenters encouraged preserving this site to provide a better understanding of how Black people rebuilt their lives in Springfield after the riot and work to overcome racism and prejudice after the riot. Commenters also discussed the site's unique connection with Abraham Lincoln and his effect on Black freedom, which contributes to the unique story of the site. One commenter expressed support for preserving the site's archeological remains, which would advance African American human rights by allowing the nation to see, experience, and learn from the Springfield Race Riot.

Hospital Sisters Health System representatives expressed support for establishing a park unit, noting their collaboration with the NAACP, elected officials, and other stakeholders to commemorate and educate the public on the riot. Hospital Sisters Health System also noted

that they have already donated part of the land toward advocacy for this project and would be willing to donate additional land, if needed, to preserve resources and support a park unit.

Opposition for Designation

Two comments opposed a potential designation so that the National Park Service could focus on memorializing positive Black history rather than painful events. One commenter said that the perpetrators of the riot weren't held accountable and that the federal government should not memorialize their actions; instead, the focus should be on coming together as one.

Vision for Preserving the Site (Reflection and Story)

Several commenters shared their vision for the future of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot archeological site, suggesting that the vision should focus on hope and history. Commenters shared that speaking about the truth could encourage appreciation for the accomplishments born out of actions meant to destroy Black people yet gave them strength to continue fighting for equality, bringing together all races. Some commenters showed support for a quiet place to encourage contemplation.

Commenters noted that although local community supporters have worked hard to mark specific sites throughout the city of Springfield, the sites are geographically dispersed. One specific plan that provides education about the riot as a whole and its lasting impact doesn't currently exist. Commenters recommended that the proposed site include a variety of activities, including on-site interpretation, a monument where visitors can pay tribute to the victims, and a space for healing and reflection. Commenters mentioned that they would like to see historical markers with facts and possibly artifacts of the destroyed homes.

Commenters also noted the commitment of the local community and mentioned their support for partnerships with local stakeholders to provide a place for healing gardens, exhibits, and memorials to the riot victims to provide healing and learning as part of the visitor experience. Commenters mentioned that they would like remaining artifacts and historic features to be protected and a visitor's center to provide educational materials about the riot and the formation of the NAACP.

Activities and Experiences at the Site (Interpretation and the Nearby Lincoln Home)

Commenters shared that a potential national park unit offers an opportunity to tell the story of the NAACP founding, along with the role of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and her advocacy for racial justice. Some commenters reported that this story is not well known. Commenters mentioned the importance of managing the space to allow reflection but also focusing on interpretation to educate visitors. Some commenters mentioned that they would like to see reenactments, educational programs for schools, and interactive activities. In some cases, commenters mentioned that they knew little about the riot after living in Springfield for many years. Some commenters mentioned the importance of telling the story so that history doesn't repeat itself. Commenters also showed support for uncovering the foundation remains of the archeological site, allowing visitors to see the resources at the site and a visual reminder of the riot.

Concern

A few commenters pointed out that a large homeless population lives nearby, which could lead visitors to feel uncomfortable. A few people voiced concerns about potential vandalism at the site and ensuring that visitors feel safe and comfortable in the area.

Questions for the Study Team

One commenter asked if this archaeological memorial site would be an appropriate place to display Sangamon County's steel column, which would be gifted from the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, located in Montgomery, Alabama. The column would contain the names of William Donnegan and Scott Burton, who were lynched during the riot.

NPS Response to This Question

This question is in reference to the Equal Justice Initiative's lynching memorialization project, about which more can be found here:

<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>. This comment will be shared with the current site owners (the City of Springfield and Hospital Sisters Health System) and the NAACP. Partnering with the Equal Justice Initiative on a memorial of this type may be appropriate and meaningful regardless of any future NPS designation, as public sentiment supports memorialization and dialogue about the riot, the lynchings, and the link to the founding of NAACP.

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