

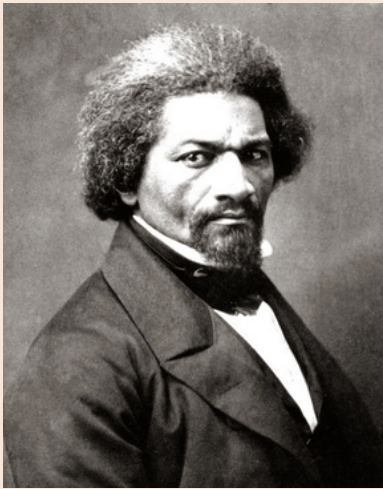
# FREDERICK DOUGLASS MEMORIAL CEMETERY NEWSLETTER

NEW

VOL. 1 ISSUE NO. 3

JUNETEENTH SPECIAL EDITION

## HISTORY



(Image Source: The New York Historical Society)

Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery located at 1421 Wilkes Street in Alexandria, VA 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.

## SECOND ANNUAL JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION



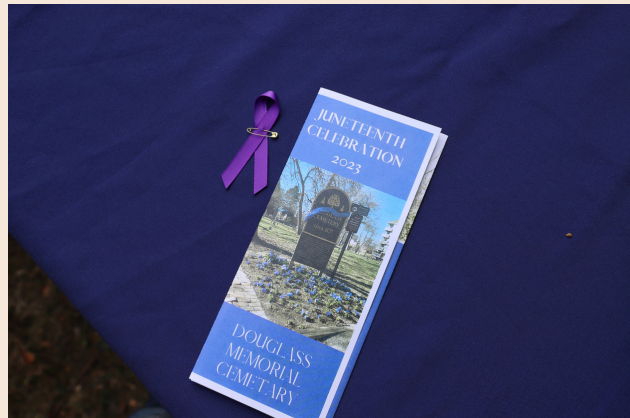
Welcome to the Friends of Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery newsletter. This quarterly newsletter will inform all stakeholders, descendants, and the public about the scope of work and ongoing progress at the cemetery. In this special edition of the newsletter, we are celebrating Juneteenth. On Saturday, June 17, 2023, descendants, stakeholders, officials, and community members gathered at Douglass to celebrate the holiday.

## SCHOLARS PROGRAM LAUNCH



The inaugural Scholars Program launched on Tuesday, June 13, 2023. The program introduces participants to the exciting history of Alexandria from its first residents to today. Students in the class will receive three hours of college credit and tour the city to discover and enjoy the history of Alexandria in a new way on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 11 AM to 2 PM on June 13 to July 20, 2023 at the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

# ADDITIONAL PHOTOS FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION



*Photo Credit: Marcel Bassett  
Office of the Chief / Public Information Officer  
Alexandria Police Department*

## CURRENT SITUATIONS



Congratulations to Michael Johnson for receiving the T. Michael Miller Award at the 2023 Alexandria Historical Society Awards Ceremony. Johnson is a descendant and stakeholder with the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery. He also is a co-editor of this quarterly newsletter.

A lifelong Alexandrian, Johnson's work as a community historian has enhanced the city's understanding of its history. He researched the history of Parker-Gray High School and presented his research at numerous talks and conferences. Johnson has also tirelessly worked to renovate and share the history of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery, which after years of effort, has led to a restoration project to return the cemetery to good condition. Johnson is also working to help establish an oral history project to further expand on the history of this burial ground.

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*Biography Credit: The Alexandria Historical Society*

# **FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND WOODLAWN CEMETERIES: FIGHTING TO DOCUMENT OUR HERITAGE**

**BY: MARJORIE WILLIAMS KINARD**

A Brief Note From Michael Johnson:

The Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery is also recognized as a part of a national network of organizations working to protect African American historic properties. I can say with great satisfaction that our efforts to preserve Alexandria's African American cemeteries are being recognized, and our work to inform "a broader community" is creating new models for historic preservation on the city, regional and state levels.

- Michael Johnson, President  
Friends of Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery

*This article has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

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*Photo Credit: Woodlawn Cemetery*

I am a member of the Washington, DC, Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and a person who understands the responsibilities of leadership. I led an effort to encourage the entire region to learn of the importance of African American Cemeteries like the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery in Alexandria, Virginia. The Woodlawn Collaborative Project is a group I am leading that works with the Woodlawn Cemetery Perpetual Care Association and has as its mission the restoration of the nearly 200-year-old Woodlawn Cemetery -- a site of "Hallowed Grounds."

Initially, my mission, along with the Heritage and Archives Committee of the Washington, DC Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., was to locate the final resting place of Mrs. Mary Edna Brown Coleman, one of the Founders of our sorority. The records on the location of the grave of Mrs. Mary Edna Brown Coleman brought us to the Woodlawn Cemetery. The push to restore the cemetery is now our major project. We invited the members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., in the [DC, Maryland, and Virginia area] to work with us because they have two Founders, Marjorie Arizona Hill and Sarah H. Meriwether Nutter, interred at Woodlawn.

Mr. Michael Johnson of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery found that the cemetery's 1.4 acres are poorly maintained; many of its gravestones have been lost due to flooding, and a sacred place has fallen into disrepair. The Douglass Cemetery and the 22.5-acre Woodlawn Cemetery, until very recently, were both covered in overgrown vegetation. I know these places need to be kept up. At Woodlawn, our Delta Sigma Theta founder is buried there. Yes, volunteers have tried to care for both the Woodlawn Cemetery and the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery over the years; Michael Johnson and I know it's been tough. Today there's a definite need for people to volunteer and help. It is my pleasure to serve as the coordinator of the Woodlawn Collaborative Project; a group focused on increasing community awareness and restoring the cemetery's peerless legacy.

In support of the work at Woodlawn Cemetery, three local Alpha Kappa Alpha chapters have joined in to strengthen the restoration effort. To further enhance our work, eighteen chapters of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. are involved with the Woodlawn Collaborative Project. For the last year, both groups have been working together to honor the thousands buried there, including Frederick Douglass, Jr. and his wife, John Mercer Langston, Blanche Bruce, and thousands more.

Like the Friends of Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery, The Woodlawn Collaborative Project has put together a number of committees. These committees are tasked with the following responsibilities: To bring Community Awareness to Woodlawn Cemetery, To provide landscaping assistance through direct and in-kind service with volunteers, To provide Historical Data Preservation to create a database to assist with locating the interred, To explore fundraising/grant opportunities and historic preservation initiatives, To launch an oral interview history project. To date, the organizations that have volunteered to work at the cemetery are Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the Prince Hall Masons, the staff of the Mayor of the District of Columbia, John Wesley AME Zion Church, along with many other individuals, families, and organizations, throughout the years, whose names go unmentioned, here. The Woodlawn Collaborative Project and I are looking to these groups - -and others- - for additional volunteers to cut the grass and maintain the cemetery.

I am inviting anybody who wants to preserve Woodlawn Cemetery and the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery -- please consider this an invitation. Remember, the vision was locked in long before we came aboard. We're going to try and take that vision and move forward with it.

On behalf of the Woodlawn Collaborative Project, I would like to thank Mr. Michael Johnson for this opportunity to inform a broader community about Woodlawn Cemetery. If you would like additional information, please go to our website at [woodlawndc.org](http://woodlawndc.org).



*Marjorie Williams Kinard*

*Photo Credit: Peaches & Sourcream Children's Foundation, Inc. Website*

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*This article includes data from the following: "Leadership," Marjorie Williams Kinard interviewed by Elizabeth Clark-Lewis on October 11, 2022; the on-line article, "Sororities help restore DC cemetery rich in Black history" published by Melissa Howell (mhowell@wtop.com) on July 20, 2022; material featured in the report "Hallowed Ground": Sororities Work to Preserve Black DC Cemetery" by Molette Green, broadcast on News4 and posted on <https://www.nbcwashington.com> - 3090335 by NBC Washington Staff and published July 1, 2022; and, Vernon Miles, "Historic Black Cemetery Under Threat of Being Washed Away in Old Town," ALXnow, August 30, 2021.*

# DUKE STREET SELF-GUIDED TOUR

BY: BLAKE WILSON



Alexandria is a city filled with history, yet, some stories have historically received more attention than others.

The purpose of the Duke Street tour will be to spark new conversations and while centering Black history in one of Alexandria's most well-known thoroughfares.

When this self-guided tour debuts, Alexandria residents and tourists alike will be able to visit various sites pertaining to the African American experience in the city founded in 1749; once there, people will be able to take pictures, ponder the meaning of these sites and hopefully better understand what it took to create the Alexandria of today.

Following the installation of signs documenting these stories on Duke Street, a more expansive digital map will be created, including more sites of importance along with the fight for Civil Rights and equality in the city.

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*Blake Wilson is an African American Research Historian contracted by the City of Alexandria through funds secured through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).*

## THE LOOK AHEAD

**Earlier this month, two events were held to address the current issues at Douglass. Here are updates about the land from those meetings:**

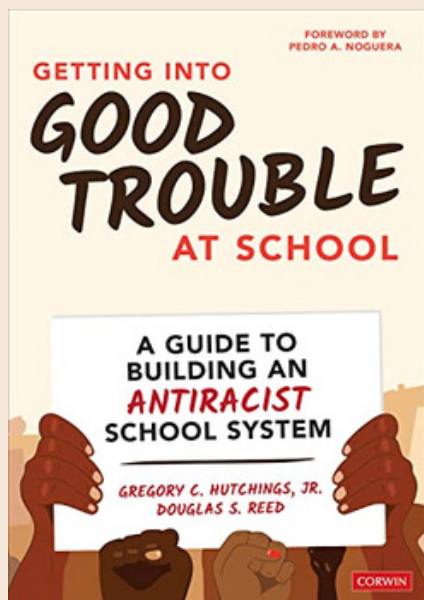
On Wednesday, June 7, 2023, stakeholders, descendants, and staff of Historic Alexandria met at the Black History Museum at 6:00 PM to discuss the scope of work needed to be done at the cemetery.

On Monday, June 12, 2023, The City of Alexandria staff, the Social Responsibility Group, and the Friends of Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery met at Nannie J. Lee Memorial Recreation Center from 5:30 PM to 7:45 PM to discuss drainage and preservation updates.

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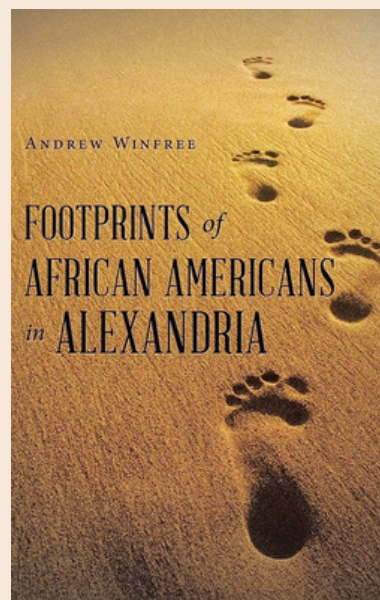
## IN HONOR OF JUNETEENTH

For the month of June, the following books are highly recommended:



*Getting Into Good Trouble at School:  
A Guide to Building an Antiracist  
School System*

by Gregory C. Hutchings  
Douglas S. Reed



*Getting Into Good Trouble at School:  
A Guide to Building an Antiracist  
School System*

by Andrew Winfree



# THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY GROUP



A Message From Pastor Lou Whiting:

The Social Responsibility Group (SRG), a community-based organization founded in September 2019, organizes city residents, faith-based organizations, business leaders, and City employees to promote policies and programs that maintain safe neighborhoods, support sustainable Black-owned businesses, transform communities, and enriches the lives of the marginalized and disadvantaged.

The SRG Scholars Program, in collaboration with Northern Virginia Community College and other key community partners, supports one of our strategic objectives.

Strategic Plan: Objective #2:

Implement Two-Generation Approach Initiatives in Reducing Poverty

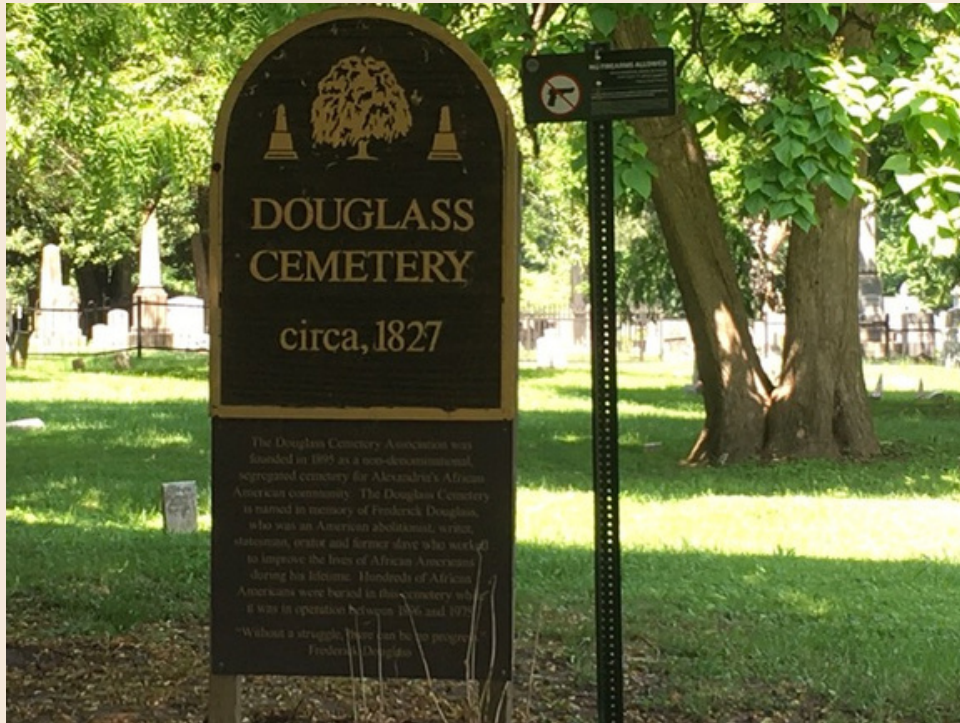
Two-generation approaches target low-income children and parents from the same household, combining parent and child interventions to interrupt the cycle of poverty.

There are five key components of the two-generation approach:

- 1.) Early childhood education
- 2.) Adult and post-secondary education and workforce pathways
- 3.) Economic supports and assets;
- 4.) Health and well-being
- 5.) Social capital

- Pastor Lou Whiting, President  
Social Responsibility Group

## CONTACTS



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Dr. Darnella Nelson  
Natalie Talis  
Officer Bennie Evans  
Verdella Jennings  
Chief Don Hayes  
Sheriff Sean Casey

# REFERENCES

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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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# THANK YOU!

A special thank you to Dr. Elizabeth Clark-Lewis and Pastor Lou Whiting for contributing to this newsletter.