



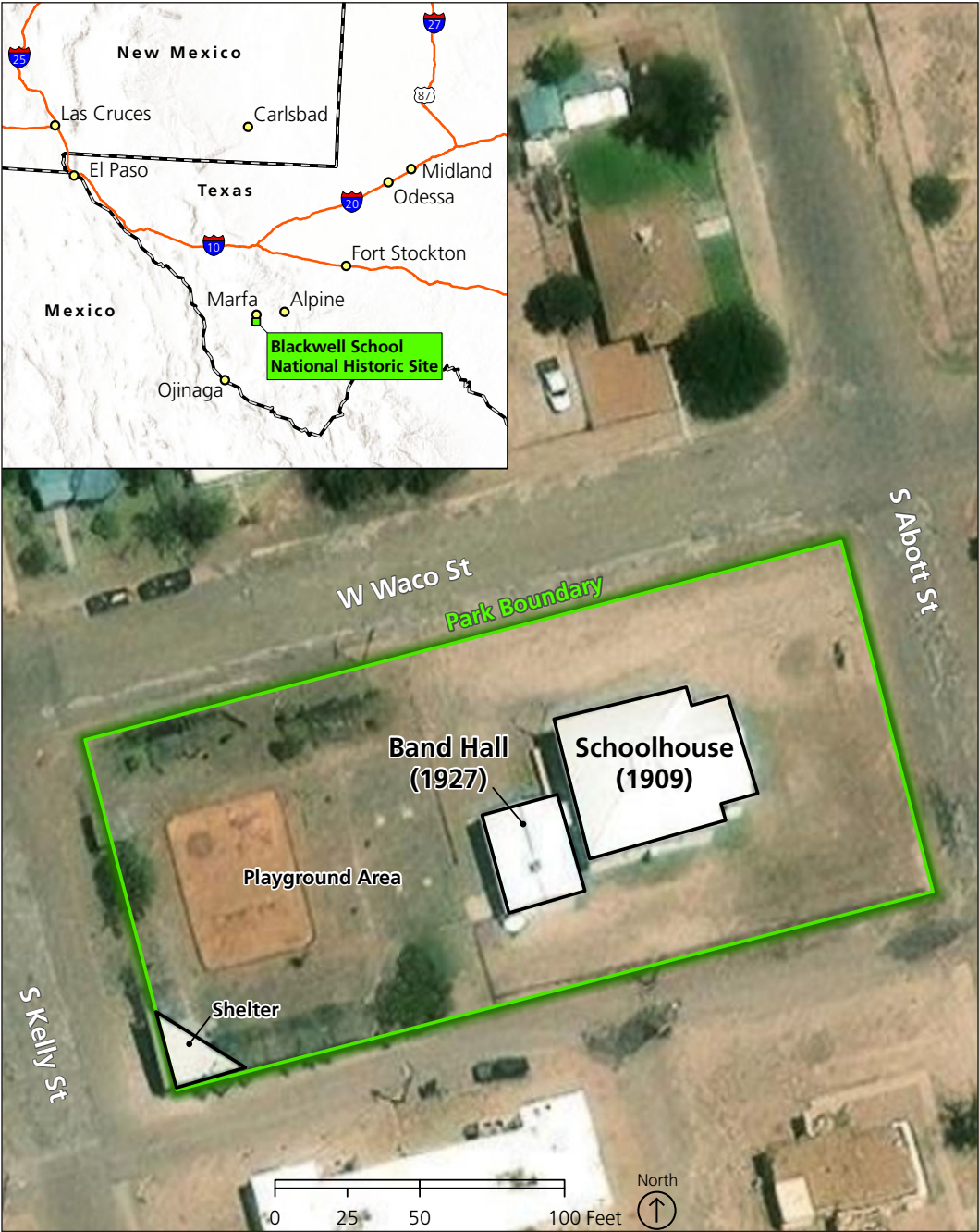
Foundation Document

Blackwell School National Historic Site

Texas

May 2025





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A Note About Terminology Used in this Document

Many communities of Latin American heritage express their own preferences for specific terms that reflect shared culture and experience. The question of terminology has been increasingly debated in conversations about demographics and heritage. Considering Blackwell School National Historic Site’s establishing legislation draws a direct connection to the segregation and cultural identity of Mexican Americans and those with Mexican ancestry, this document relies on terms applied to individuals who live in what is now the state of Texas and the region that was previously part of New Spain, Mexican Texas, and the Republic of Texas, as opposed to broader terminology that may apply to anyone who speaks Spanish or is associated with Latin America.

The following terms appear in the brief description of regional history and the Blackwell School. Many of the included definitions were taken from the National Museum of American History Behring Center’s “Mexican America: Glossary” (<https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object-groups/mexican-america/mexican-america-glossary>). Additional definitions are defined in the document “A Guide to Ethnic Labels for Spanish-Speaking Peoples in the US Southwest,” prepared for Blackwell School National Historic Site by scholars at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Anglo: In Texas, New Mexico, and other areas of the United States with large Hispanic or Mexican American populations, *Anglo* (from Anglo-Saxon) refers to White English speakers, their cultures, and their historical perspectives. This term reflects a long-standing perception of cultural difference between the descendants of English- and the Spanish-speaking colonists.

Indigenous: There is no generally accepted definition of Indigenous people, although it is often used to describe people who share collective ancestral ties to the original occupants of a geographic region before colonization.

Juan Crow: Laws targeting Latino people and immigrants from Mexico and Central America patterned after American Jim Crow laws that targeted African Americans have been described as examples of *Juan Crow*. The term has been used to discuss the historical treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans that can be compared to that experienced by African Americans in the Jim Crow era related to mob violence, segregation, and voting rights.

Mestizo: A Spanish term meaning “mixed race,” *mestizo* is often used in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, to refer to a person of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. The term historically has included people of mixed African ancestry as well.

Mexican American: This term describes a wide category of people who live in the United States and who have a familial link to Mexico or Mexican culture. It can include people who have roots in Mexican territories prior to the Mexican-American War, who might not speak Spanish, as well as recent immigrants, some of whom might speak an Indigenous language.

Mexican-American War: This war (1846–1848) was a territorial conflict between the United States and Mexico. It had roots in the secession of Texas from Mexico in 1836 and in the annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845. Under terms set by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the upper half of Mexican territory (from California to Texas) was ceded to the United States.

Tejano: As the original Spanish term for a Texan, *Tejano* can be used to describe the Hispanic and/or Mexican residents of Texas both before Texan Independence (1836) and up to the present.

Texian: The term *Texian* was generally used to apply to a citizen of the Anglo-American section of the province of Coahuila y Tejas or of the Republic of Texas (1835–1845). Texan replaced Texian in general usage after annexation by the United States.

Mission of the National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS) is a bureau within the Department of the Interior. While numerous national park system units were created prior to 1916, it was not until August 25, 1916, that President Woodrow Wilson signed the National Park Service Organic Act (16 U.S.C. 1-4), formally establishing the National Park Service. The Act outlined the broad mission of the NPS:

The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

The National Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

The national park system continues to grow and comprises more than 430 park units covering more than 84 million acres in every state, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. These units include, but are not limited to, national parks, monuments, battlefields, military parks, historical parks, historic sites, lakeshores, seashores, recreation areas, scenic rivers and trails, and the White House. The variety and uniqueness of park units throughout the nation require a strong commitment to resource stewardship and management to ensure both the protection and enjoyment of these resources for future generations.



The arrowhead was authorized as the official National Park Service emblem by the Secretary of the Interior on July 20, 1951. The sequoia tree and bison represent vegetation and wildlife, the mountains and water represent scenic and recreational values, and the arrowhead represents historical and archeological values.

Introduction

NPS Director's Order 2 specifies that every unit of the national park system will have a foundational document to provide basic guidance for planning and management decisions. The core components of a foundation document flow from the enabling legislation or proclamation designating the unit and include the park's purpose, significance, fundamental resources and values, and interpretive themes. The foundation document also includes a brief description of the park; other important resources and values; related resources; special mandates and administrative commitments; and an assessment of planning and data needs that identifies planning issues, planning products to be developed, and the associated studies and data required for park planning. This assessment provides a focus for park planning activities and establishes a baseline from which planning documents are developed.

A primary benefit of developing a foundation document is the creation of a single, shared understanding of what is most important about the park that sets the stage for future planning in each unit of the national park system. The process of developing a foundation document begins with gathering and integrating information about the park. Next, this information is refined and focused to determine what the most important attributes of the park are. The process of preparing a foundation document aids park managers, staff, the public, Tribal nations, and other stakeholders in identifying and clearly stating in one document the essential information that is necessary for park management to consider when determining future planning efforts, outlining key planning issues, and protecting resources and values that are integral to park purpose and identity.



Part 1: Static Components

Core components of a foundation document include the park purpose, statements of the park's significance, the park's fundamental resources and values, and interpretive themes. These components are core because they typically do not change over time. Core components are expected to be primary considerations in future planning and management efforts. This section of the foundation document presents the core components and includes a brief description of the park and a listing of other important resources and values that are not core to supporting the park's purpose and significance but which are static elements anticipated to be a focus of management efforts. Related resources are also listed here. They are resources or values that are not managed or owned by the National Park Service but can enhance public appreciation of the park and its significance and may be influenced through park collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

Brief Description of the Park

Blackwell School is the sole surviving institution in Marfa, Texas, that is directly associated with the segregated education of students of Mexican descent. As described in the enabling legislation for Blackwell School (Public Law 117-206, sec. 2), the school is a “tangible reminder of a time when the practice of ‘separate but equal’ dominated education and social systems” during the first half of the 20th century and is a representation of the persistence of Mexican and Mexican American history and “maintaining cultural identity in a dominant Anglo society.”

A long history of racialization and stereotyping has roots in the European colonization of what is now the American Southwest. A social caste system placing Indigenous Americans below those with European ancestry dates to 17th-century European settlement and colonization attempts in North America. Spanish colonizers instituted a detailed, race-based hierarchy in Spanish territories that was born out of the widespread intermarriages of Spaniards, Indigenous people, and Africans who began arriving in Spanish Mexico in 1528 as enslaved laborers. The social hierarchy placed Indigenous Americans and *mestizos*—the term used at the time to describe those of mixed Indigenous and Spanish ancestry—in lower levels of the social structure within the Spanish Empire.

Mexico won independence from Spain with the Treaty of Córdoba on August 24, 1821. However, over a decade of fighting left the new nation politically weak and regionally fragmented. During the final years of the war, the Spanish government encouraged Spanish citizens to settle in the most northeastern region of Spanish Mexico that bordered the state of Louisiana. Spanish political leaders hoped that additional settlement in the remote and sparsely populated state of Coahuila y Tejas would create a buffer from the United States and boost Spain's presence in the far stretches of the territory amidst the illegal movement of US citizens into the Red River Valley in the previous decade. After Mexico became an independent nation, its government also encouraged settlement in the area—then considered Mexican Texas—through generous land grants aimed toward attracting American citizens. The Colonization Act of 1825 spurred a land rush into Mexican Texas from the southern United States. Under the act, immigrants were required to become Mexican citizens, learn Spanish, and convert to Catholicism to obtain the grants. Animosity directed against *Tejanos*—Texans of Mexican descent—increased as more Anglo-American citizens moved into Texas. Many of these Anglo-American farmers brought slaves to work the large agricultural plantations developing in eastern Texas, which drastically increased the African and African American population of the region and added another dimension to local racial politics. Fearing the growing number of US citizens in the region, the Mexican government passed laws in 1830 restricting immigration from the United States, but the demographics of Coahuila y Tejas had already shifted to an Anglo majority with deep ties to the United States.



Simmering conflict continued in the region due to the United States' increasing interest in expansion, the growing Anglo-American presence in what was remote northern Mexico, and a civil war between Mexican factions over the move from state autonomy toward a more centralized Mexican government. Approximately 30,000 Americans—most of whom acquired Mexican citizenship—were living in Mexican Texas in 1835; they far outnumbered the approximately 5,000 Mexican-born citizens in the Texas territory. Many *Texians*—Anglo-American residents of Mexican Texas—acquired massive amounts of land and political power under the Mexican colonization movement of the previous decades and resented moves by Mexican President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna to consolidate political power from Mexican states to a centralized government and Mexico's recent abolition of slavery.

The Texas Revolution (1835–1836) separated Texas from Mexico. While being held as a prisoner of war, Mexican President López de Santa Anna signed the Treaty of Velasco acknowledging Texas as an independent republic. However, Mexican authorities refused to ratify the treaty because it was signed under duress. Border disputes continued over territory claimed by the Republic of Texas that stretched well beyond what was once the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas. During the decade of the Republic of Texas's existence (1836–1845), wealthy American speculators purchased an additional 1.3 million acres of land from Tejanos, displacing thousands of families. After the US Congress's annexation of Texas in December 1845 and President James K. Polk's failed attempt to purchase Texas from Mexico, Mexican forces fired on US troops sent into the Republic of Texas by President Polk and ignited the Mexican-American War. Many Texians and White US citizens viewed the Texas territory as part of the United States' manifest destiny of stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. The conflict, which was the first example of the United States attempting to annex land offensively, also promulgated the view that the United States was a civilized nation saving land, resources, and inhabitants from an uncivilized Mexican government.

Penned by diplomats from Mexico and the United States, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brought an official end to the war between the United States and Mexico. It ceded the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, most of Arizona and Colorado, and parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Wyoming to the United States; it also relinquished Mexico's claim to Texas and established the Rio Grande as the southern border of the United States. The treaty recognized the approximately 75,000 former Mexican residents in these areas as having the same rights and legal protections as US citizens and extended them the opportunity to become US citizens if they desired; this left Tejanos and other Mexicans in the US territories in the unique position of being the first “non-White” American citizens. Despite the terms of the treaty, extrajudicial prejudice based on race, religion, and Mexican culture that was fanned during the War for Mexican Independence, the Texas Revolution, and the Mexican-American War continued to prevail across the state.

De facto segregation between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans was common across the Southwest and increased significantly during the second half of the 19th century as more Anglos moved into Texas following the Mexican-American War and the expansion of the railroad. Laws, social customs, economic institutions, and symbolic systems enacted at local and state levels physically and psychologically isolated those of Mexican descent much like Jim Crow practices discriminated against African Americans. The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* US Supreme Court decision upheld state-mandated segregation laws and codified “separate but equal” accommodations based on race, but segregation against Mexican Americans was never legalized, making the situation Mexican Americans faced difficult to legally dismantle.

Segregation in Texas public education supported a social hierarchy based on the perceived superiority of English-speakers. The 1854 Common School Law established the Texas public school system, and an amendment added to the law in 1858 made school funding dependent on English being taught as the primary language in public classrooms. The 1876 Texas state constitution mandated segregation in all levels of education and required separate schools for Black and White students; Mexican American students were not mentioned but most were forced to attend state-sponsored “Mexican schools.”

Mexican schools, which eventually operated in over 120 school districts in 59 counties across Texas, reinforced the economic and social subjugation of Hispanics and created additional barriers for students looking to continue past primary school within the public education system. Curriculum at these schools focused on foundational literacy and basic workforce skills and ultimately looked to assimilate students into the Anglo-dominant American culture and promote the English language through a “no Spanish in the classroom” rule. However, Mexican schools also provided space for the Hispanic community to celebrate their culture and heritage.

Marfa’s Blackwell School highlights how segregated education developed and was sustained for almost a century through Texas’s public school system. Marfa, Texas—founded in 1883 as a railroad water stop in far west Texas—opened its first public school in 1885. This school was initially attended by all children in the community. As the community’s population grew, the Marfa school district constructed a new school in 1892. School officials claimed Marfa students of Mexican descent had English-language deficiencies that necessitated separate, specialized instruction; Mexican American pupils continued to attend classes in the 1885 building while White students attended classes in the new structure.



In 1909, the local school district constructed a schoolhouse south of Marfa's downtown dedicated to the education of Mexican American students. The new school, called the "Ward School" or "Mexican School," replaced the one-room original 1885 schoolhouse but continued to justify de facto segregation based on perceived English-language deficiencies. The Marfa Mexican School opened in September 1909 and featured a traditional schoolhouse design and adobe construction. Adobe is a blend of sand, clay, and silt that can be mixed with a binding material like straw and molded into bricks; it is a regionally popular building technique in the US Southwest that can flex under changing temperatures and keeps interiors cool in hot climates. This traditional technique, which became popular with Anglo and Mexican Americans, was also cost-effective in an area where wood and stone building materials were scarce. The school's interior was separated into a vestibule and two classrooms. During the early years, two teachers oversaw approximately 80–100 students. The school gradually expanded, and a second building, the "band hall," was added in 1927.

Blackwell teachers and leaders simultaneously supported the assimilation to Anglo culture while providing support and extracurricular enrichment for their students. The first teachers, some of whom were recent Marfa High School graduates, taught students English through magazine cut-outs because the school did not have textbooks. Long-time principal and teacher Jesse Blackwell, who worked at the school from 1922 until 1947, organized a Spanish-language branch of the Interscholastic League to encourage students from across the region to participate in scholastic competitions. In 1937, more than 150 students from nearby school districts came to Marfa to compete in the Spanish Interscholastic League.

That same year, the Deputy State Superintendent of Public Schools recommended that another grade be added to the Mexican School. A nine-classroom building with a gymnasium was constructed by the Marfa Independent School District (ISD) using local bonds and Works Progress Administration funding to accommodate the ninth-grade curriculum. By the 1940s, the Mexican School had grown into a 5-acre educational campus attended by more than 600 students during the years of World War II. Junior high students attending the Mexican School could take part in extracurriculars including band, basketball, football, academic competitions, and school dances. In 1940, Principal Jesse Blackwell was honored by the state for his many years associated with Marfa public schools with the redesignation of the "Marfa Ward School" as "Blackwell Junior High School."



Photo courtesy of the Marfa and Presidio County Museum Association



Photo courtesy of the Marfa and Presidio County Museum Association

The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* officially ended school segregation, but it took years and several subsequent court cases for desegregation to become the norm in elementary schools across the country. Legislation also created programs that continued practices previously perpetuated in segregated schools. During his presidential term (1963–1969), President Lyndon B. Johnson—who taught at a segregated Mexican school in the border town of Cotulla, Texas, the summer after his sophomore year of college—pursued a wide-sweeping domestic agenda, including efforts like his Great Society program and War on Poverty. Johnson drew inspiration from his time in the classroom and hoped to combat the inequality and poverty faced by his Mexican American students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, one piece of legislation supporting Johnson’s agenda, provided federal funding for school programs, supplies, and professional development to improve access to education regardless of economic background.

In 1965, the same year the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed into law, Marfa ISD constructed an integrated elementary school and transferred all Blackwell students to the new facility. Some of the Blackwell teachers transitioned to Marfa’s integrated schools alongside their former students. In 1969, the school district sold most of the Blackwell School campus to the Marfa Housing Authority for redevelopment as affordable public housing. Except for the original 1909 Blackwell School and 1927 band hall structures, which were retained by Marfa ISD, the other campus buildings were razed. The school and band hall provided space for vocational courses and district storage starting in 1971. During this period, large portions of the Blackwell School’s west wall were removed to install a loading dock and roll-up garage door to support technical education. The building was also reconfigured to connect the schoolhouse and band hall via a concrete ramp and enclosed walkway. Marfa ISD vacated the buildings in 1996.

Learning that the Marfa ISD was considering demolishing the remaining Mexican School buildings in 2006, a group of alumni formed the Blackwell School Alliance to preserve the school’s history and secured a 99-year lease on the Blackwell School from Marfa ISD. The Blackwell School Alliance gathered a collection of artifacts, photos, and memorabilia to display in the historic building, and it opened the site for limited hours of public visitation and as a venue for community events. In growing recognition of the property’s historical value, the Blackwell School was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2019 as a representation of the de facto racial segregation that existed across Texas into the mid-20th century and the education of Mexican American children and students of Mexican descent in Marfa between 1909 and 1965. Further grassroots efforts by the Blackwell School Alliance and others led to the designation of the Blackwell School as a national historic site in October 2022. The Blackwell School National Historic Site was officially established in July 2024, when the school property was transferred by Marfa ISD to federal ownership.

Park Purpose

The purpose statement identifies the specific reason(s) for establishment of a particular park. The purpose statement for Blackwell School National Historic Site was drafted through a careful analysis of its enabling legislation and the legislative history that influenced its development. The park was designated when the President signed the enabling legislation adopted by Congress on October 17, 2022 (see appendix A). The purpose statement lays the foundation for understanding what is most important about the park.

BLACKWELL SCHOOL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE and its partners preserve the Blackwell School—an academic and cultural cornerstone for the local Mexican and Mexican American community in Marfa, Texas—as a physical reminder of the segregated public education system that separated Mexicans and Mexican Americans from Anglo students. The national historic site highlights the experiences of students and teachers at Blackwell School, and encourages reflection about the impacts of racial segregation practices and education in the Southwest and throughout the United States.



Park Significance

Significance statements express why a park's resources and values are important enough to merit designation as a unit of the national park system. These statements are linked to the purpose of Blackwell School National Historic Site, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Statements of significance describe the distinctive nature of the park and why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. They focus on the most important resources and values that will assist in park planning and management.

The following significance statements have been identified for Blackwell School National Historic Site. (Please note that the sequence of the statements does not reflect the level of significance.)

1. The Blackwell School, constructed in 1909, stands as one of the few remaining properties in Texas that is directly associated with the public education of children of Mexican descent under racial segregation practices beginning in the late 1800s. The school's location within Marfa and its relationship to other extant community structures from the same era offer thought-provoking context to the lived community experience under ostensibly "separate but equal" segregation.
2. When the Marfa school district constructed what was to become the Blackwell School, it chose to use adobe construction, a traditional method that has historic ties to Indigenous communities, Mexico, and the greater Chihuahuan Desert. The Blackwell School's vernacular design incorporated local materials and centuries-old building techniques passed through generations of artisans throughout the Big Bend and Southwest regions. It stood in contrast to the two-story, red-brick school building where Anglo students attended classes.
3. Grassroots preservation efforts spearheaded by former students, teachers, and Marfa community members saved Blackwell School from demolition in the early 2000s; the national historic site exists as one of the few properties dedicated to Mexican American history because of these preservation efforts. The school is positioned as a cultural touchstone for alumni and descendants, reflecting their strong sense of identity and perseverance in mobilizing to preserve Blackwell School's legacy.
4. Attitudes of 19th-century Anglos traveling through and settling in what would become the American Southwest instituted a continuation of racism against Indigenous, Black, and mixed-race populations historically connected to the region; deep-rooted, discriminatory ideas bolstered by expansion and exclusion shaped contemporary Texas state laws and the prejudiced social systems that created segregated "Mexican schools."
5. Blackwell School is a tangible reminder of racial segregation in education and disparities in physical and intellectual resources provided to public schools; "Mexican schools" were not funded comparably and were often established in older buildings with minimal recreation space and inadequate school equipment. The Blackwell School had a 5-acre campus with a playground, but the bare grounds and limited facilities and resources stood in stark contrast to the well-manicured grounds at Anglo public schools.
6. The stories of Blackwell alumni demonstrate the ways in which Mexican influences—language, food, music, and other shared experiences—shape personal and communal identities.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values (FRVs) are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance. Fundamental resources and values are closely related to a park's legislative purpose and are more specific than significance statements.

Fundamental resources and values help focus planning and management efforts on what is truly significant about the park. One of the most important responsibilities of NPS managers is to ensure the conservation and public enjoyment of those qualities that are essential (fundamental) to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance. If fundamental resources and values are allowed to deteriorate, the park purpose and/or significance could be jeopardized.

The following fundamental resources and values have been identified for Blackwell School National Historic Site:

- Historic Structures and Grounds.** The last two remaining buildings of the Blackwell School Campus—the 1909 adobe schoolhouse and 1927 band hall—and the surrounding grounds are tangible reminders of the segregation in public education that was common in 20th-century American communities.
- Personal Stories, Archives, and Collections.** Personal stories—established in oral histories, archives, and collections associated with the Blackwell School—represent the lived experience of segregation. The Blackwell School Alliance and the Marfa and Presidio County Museum have collected hundreds of physical and digital items from former students and teachers including manuscripts, photographs, school memorabilia, news clippings, and audio and visual recordings. School desks from the Blackwell School are on display within the historic structure. Together, these collections enhance the experiences of alumni and others connected to Blackwell School. They encourage consideration and the establishment of relationships among individuals, the broader Mexican American community, and present-day visitors while providing opportunities for research and education.
- Community Connections and Partnerships.** Since its construction in 1909, Blackwell School has become a physical representation of the Mexican American students, neighborhood, and community of Marfa and it continues to bring alumni together to preserve the building and its history. In 2006, a group of Blackwell School alumni organized the Blackwell School Alliance to save the last remaining Mexican School buildings from demolition. The alliance worked with the Marfa ISD to open the space to visitors and interpret the complex history of segregated education in west Texas. Continued collaboration with local groups and those associated with Blackwell School will ensure the lessons from the period of segregation in Texas are incorporated into the history of Marfa and the Big Bend region.



Other Important Resources and Values

Blackwell School National Historic Site contains other resources and values that are not fundamental to the purpose of the park and may be unrelated to its significance but are important to consider in planning processes. These are referred to as “other important resources and values” (OIRV). These resources and values have been selected because they are important in the operation and management of the park and warrant special consideration in park planning.

The following other important resources and values have been identified for Blackwell School National Historic Site.

- **Community Park and Playground.** Blackwell Park is an important resource because it is one of the few public recreational spaces in the historically Mexican American neighborhood of South Marfa. It is used by the community in ways that honor the traditional function of the original playground for Blackwell School students. The current equipment was installed in the late 2000s and early 2010s; it is not historic. Blackwell School’s historic playground was not located on the current playground’s footprint. The park preserves safe, free, local space for recreation, such as picnicking, community events, and general enjoyment of the outdoors. It creates opportunities to serve additional local user groups and provides valuable public space for connection and engagement.
- **Dark Skies.** The Greater Big Bend International Dark Sky Reserve is the largest International Dark-Sky Association–certified reserve in the world and the first to cross an international boundary. Covering over 15,000 square miles, the reserve represents partnership between communities, parks, businesses, and conservation groups in Texas and Mexico with the shared goal of protecting the night sky from the spread of light pollution with night-sky friendly lighting practices. Presidio County is included in the peripheral or supporting area of the dark sky reserve, and the City of Marfa actively supports astrotourism associated with night sky viewing and the mysterious Marfa Lights.



Related Resources

Related resources are typically not owned by the National Park Service. They may be part of the broader context or setting in which park resources exist, represent a thematic connection that enhances the experience of visitors, or have close associations with park fundamental resources and the purpose of the park. The related resources represent a connection with the park that often reflects an area of mutual benefit or interest, and an opportunity for collaboration between the park and owner or manager of the related resource.

The following related resources have been identified for Blackwell School National Historic Site:

- **Historic Buildings in Marfa.** The Central Marfa Historic District, which encompasses 183 contributing buildings and architectural resources along Highland Avenue, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in April 2022 (NRIS #100007597).
 - **Hunter Gym.** Constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1941 as part of Marfa High School's campus in northern Marfa, Marfa ISD's Hunter Gym hosted student sporting events, practices, and scholastic gatherings for almost six decades. The gym's adobe design mirrored the 1940 adobe Blackwell Junior High School building that was also constructed by the WPA; the junior high was one of the buildings demolished in 1969 after Blackwell School closed and much of the Mexican School campus was sold to the Marfa Housing Authority.
 - **St. Mary's Catholic Church and School.** Many Blackwell families attended St. Mary's Catholic School; some students transferred between the Catholic parochial school and Blackwell School—which did not require tuition—multiple times during their education.
 - **USO Hall.** The USO Hall was originally built in 1940 as a space for soldiers stationed at Fort D.A. Russell. After the fort was closed in 1946 as part of the demobilization following World War II, the hall hosted Blackwell School extracurricular events and dances. The photo honor roll commemorates generations of Marfa veterans, many of whom attended Blackwell School. The building has been rehabilitated and is open to the public as the Marfa Tourism Office and Visitor Center.
- **Marfa's Cemeteries.** The physical separation of three local cemeteries—the Anglo Cemetery, Cementerio de la Merced, and the Marfa Catholic Cemetery—and the differences between the White and Mexican sections are visible reminders of a time when Mexican Americans were regularly excluded from socially commingling with Anglo individuals.
- **Other “Mexican Schools.”** Between 1902 and 1940, over 122 racially segregated schools existed in 59 counties across Texas—a total that includes schools serving African American and Mexican students. Other states including New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, and parts of the Midwest also created racially segregated public schools for students of Mexican descent. Most of the buildings constructed as segregated Mexican schools are no longer standing, but some—including the 1926 Welhausen Ward Elementary School in Cotulla, Texas, where future president Lyndon B. Johnson taught—are documented and part of state registers of historic places and historic marker programs. Additional research is needed to identify remaining schools in Texas and other states, better understand their role in individual communities and their relationship to Mexican American identity, and potentially build relationships with the organizations dedicated to preserving these buildings and their history.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park. They define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all park significance statements and fundamental and other important resources and values.

Interpretive themes are an organizational tool that reveal and clarify meaning, concepts, contexts, and values represented by park resources. Sound themes are accurate and reflect current scholarship and science. They encourage exploration of the context in which events or natural processes occurred and the effects of those events and processes. Interpretive themes go beyond a mere description of the event or process to foster multiple opportunities to experience and consider the park and its resources. These themes help explain why a park story is relevant to people who may otherwise be unaware of connections they have to an event, time, or place associated with the park.

The following interpretive themes have been identified for Blackwell School National Historic Site:

- The traditional adobe structure of the Blackwell School stands as a physical reminder of segregation and “separate but equal” policies that shaped American social and educational systems in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while also reflecting the Mexican and Mexican American cultural influences that contributed to its creation.

Potential topics to be explored within this theme:

- the physical structure built using traditional and regionally popular methods that celebrates the Southwestern culture impacted by segregation in the late 19th to mid-20th centuries
- the process of creating adobe buildings from a blend of sand, clay, and silt mixed with a binding material like straw and molded into bricks, and the cultural importance of adobe
- the historic buildings as representations of Hispanic influences and Mexican cultural identity in Marfa
- The story of the Blackwell School is not just about racial segregation; it is a rich and evolving mosaic of shared and individual experiences of students, teachers, families, neighbors, and the local community.

Potential topics to be explored within this theme:

- the history of civil rights in the United States generally and Texas specifically that led to the creation of Mexican schools
- the variety of shared and individual experiences of people associated with the Blackwell School
- the impact teachers had on students and the positive and negative outcomes including the “no sabo” generation, or those who did not learn Spanish
- intergenerational perspectives on personal and community identity and legacy

- Blackwell School students and their families resiliently overcame limitations imposed on them by segregationist policies in the Texas educational system and went on to lead fruitful and successful lives.

Potential topics to be explored within this theme:

- the successful lives of students after Blackwell (and how success can take many forms)
- segregated education across Texas and America
- Throughout its history, Blackwell School has served as a catalyst for students and community to gather, celebrate, share, and learn about their Mexican culture and heritage.

Potential topics to be explored within this theme:

- the celebration, persistence, and resilience of Mexican and Mexican American culture
- the community that existed in and around the Blackwell School
- alumni creating the Blackwell School Alliance, saving the school from demolition, and preserving memories
- celebrating the efforts of the Blackwell School Alliance and grassroots effort
- By acknowledging and interpreting the events and experiences that occurred there, Blackwell School National Historic Site continues the school's legacy of educating current and future generations and provides opportunities for Marfa and the Mexican American community to reflect on the continuing effects of segregation.

Potential topics to be explored within this theme:

- the power of acknowledging the unfair treatment of communities through the "separate but equal" practices that dominated education and social systems
- the role of Blackwell School National Historic Site to teach others about what happened there and make historic actions relevant to today
- reflecting on how what happened at Blackwell school affected the community in the past and has lasting repercussions today



Part 2: Dynamic Components

The dynamic components of a foundation document include special mandates and administrative commitments and an assessment of planning and data needs. These components are dynamic because they will change over time. New special mandates can be established and new administrative commitments made. As conditions and trends of fundamental and other important resources and values change over time, the analysis of planning and data needs will need to be revisited and revised, along with key issues. Therefore, this part of the foundation document will be updated accordingly.

Special Mandates and Administrative Commitments

Many management decisions for a park unit are directed or influenced by special mandates and administrative commitments with other federal agencies, state and local governments, utility companies, partnering organizations, and other entities. Special mandates are requirements specific to a park that must be fulfilled. Mandates can be expressed in enabling legislation, in separate legislation following the establishment of the park, or through a judicial process. They may expand on park purpose or introduce elements unrelated to the purpose of the park. Administrative commitments are, in general, agreements that have been reached through formal, documented processes, often through memorandums of agreement. Examples include easements, rights-of-way, arrangements for emergency service responses, etc. Special mandates and administrative commitments can support, in many cases, a network of partnerships that help fulfill the objectives of the park and facilitate working relationships with other organizations. They are an essential component of managing and planning for Blackwell School National Historic Site.

Special Mandates

- The Blackwell School National Historic Site Act—Public Law 117-206, section 4e—directs the Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with the Blackwell School Alliance and other local, regional, state, academic, and nonprofit partners for interpretive and educational programming, technical assistance, and rehabilitation relating to the national historic site.

Administrative Commitments

- The National Park Service and the Blackwell School Alliance have entered into a general agreement governing the loan of property currently inside the school and owned by the Blackwell School Alliance. The agreement allows the park to continue to exhibit the potential museum and interpretive items while the National Park Service completes an evaluation of the property and develops a scope of collection statement to guide the identification of objects and archives that should form the core of the park's museum collection.

Assessment of Planning and Data Needs

Once the core components of part 1 of the foundation document have been identified, it is important to gather and evaluate existing information about the park's fundamental and other important resources and values and develop a full assessment of the park's planning and data needs. The assessment of planning and data needs section presents planning issues, the planning projects that will address these issues, and the associated information requirements for planning, such as resource inventories and data collection, including GIS data.

There are three sections in the assessment of planning and data needs:

1. analysis of fundamental and other important resources and values
2. identification of key issues and associated planning and data needs
3. identification of planning and data needs (including spatial mapping activities or GIS maps)

The analysis of fundamental and other important resources and values and identification of key issues leads up to and supports the identification of planning and data collection needs.

Analysis of Fundamental Resources and Values

The fundamental resource or value analysis table includes current conditions, potential threats and opportunities, planning and data needs, and selected laws and NPS policies related to management of the identified resource or value.

Fundamental Resource or Value	Historic Structures and Grounds
Related Significance Statements	Significance statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6
Current Conditions and Trends	Conditions • Marfa ISD oversaw substantial structural modifications to the 1909 school building and 1927 band hall since the Blackwell School's closure in 1963 including the removal of the schoolhouse's west wall, creation of an enclosed concrete ramp connecting the historic structures, and enclosure of the band hall windows. • The 1909 school building was constructed using traditional adobe techniques; in comparison, the 1927 band hall is structural clay tile over a concrete perimeter beam. • The buildings are in stable condition, capable of accepting visitation, but in need of significant work to restore the period of significance and maximize visitor experience. • The only restroom available at the site is the former school toilets located in the original vestibule. Trends • Visitation has been increasing in recent years due to increased publicity.

Fundamental Resource or Value	Historic Structures and Grounds
Threats and Opportunities	Threats • The current lack of landscaping has led to visitors parking on the grounds between the school and Waco Street. • Increasing visitation may lead to more cars parking on the street, which could potentially impact neighbors. • Neither historic building is accessible per Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards (ABAAS) requirements. • Early 20th-century buildings sometimes include hazardous materials including lead paint and asbestos. • Termites, rodents, and other pests can damage historic building materials. • Changes in weather patterns expected for Presidio County include extreme heat, decreasing precipitation, and drought, which would affect landscaping, maintenance of park infrastructure, and visitor and staff health and safety. • As research and restoration projects proceed, additional structural problems may be uncovered. • Restorations will require temporary closures that would disrupt visitation to the school. • Craftspeople with adobe expertise are becoming more difficult to find. Opportunities • Possible restoration projects mentioned in the 2019 historic structure report and NPS-recommended facilities improvements include reconstructing the cupola and reconfiguring the hallway connecting the school and band hall for accessibility. • Restoration projects should integrate locally sourced or recycled materials and incorporate modern energy solutions where possible. • Preservation partners may be able to help with building improvements. • Opportunities exist to host the Fort Davis National Historic Site adobe preservation crew and provide workshops about adobe construction techniques. • Blackwell School National Historic Site could strengthen its connections to other NPS sites associated with civil rights and segregated education through interpretation and coordinated programs and educational material. • Developing a school curriculum would connect the Blackwell School's history with current students and visitors. • Opportunities for NPS visitor contact and interpretation could be extended into the neighborhood or other local spots. • Opportunities exist to use modern technology, including digital and interactive exhibits, audio tours, and multilingual interpretive materials and signage. • Reconfiguring and formalizing site parking would help direct visitor vehicles. • Community outreach can help guide restoration efforts and be opened to the public as adobe workshops.
Existing Data and Plans Related to the FRV	• Condition Assessment and Preservation Recommendations (2008) • Blackwell School National Register of Historic Places nomination (2019) • Historic Structure Report prepared for Blackwell School Alliance by the University of Texas at San Antonio (2019) • NPS Recommended Facilities Projects (2024)

Fundamental Resource or Value	Historic Structures and Grounds
Data and/or GIS Needs	• Visitor use study • Market research study • Philanthropic partnership agreement • Special landscape study • Concurrent jurisdiction agreement with the City of Marfa • Facility management strategic investment plan • Community outreach and engagement strategy • Digital modeling, photo documentation, or LiDAR data of school and band hall • Visual resource inventory
Planning Needs	• Blackwell School management vision • Comprehensive interpretive plan • Physical security plan • Emergency action plan • Exhibit plan • Structural fire management plan • Integrated pest management plan • Historic furnishing plan • Housekeeping plan
Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the FRV, and NPS Policy-level Guidance	Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the FRV • Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC 12101 et seq.) • Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 • National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended • National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 • Executive Order 11593, "Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment" • "Protection of Historic Properties" (36 CFR 800) • Historic Sites Act of 1935 (54 USC 320101 et seq.) NPS Policy-level Guidance (NPS Management Policies 2006 and Director's Orders) • NPS <i>Management Policies 2006</i> (ch. 5) "Cultural Resource Management" • Director's Order 28: <i>Cultural Resource Management</i> • <i>The Secretary of Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation</i> • <i>The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties</i> • <i>Programmatic Agreement among the National Park Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Council of State Historic Preservation Officers (2008)</i>



Photo by Sarah M. Vasquez, courtesy of Blackwell School Alliance

Fundamental Resource or Value	Personal Stories, Archives, and Collections
Related Significance Statements	Significance statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6
Current Conditions and Trends	Conditions • An oral history collection is growing and includes past audio recordings collected and transcribed by the Blackwell School Alliance (BSA) and current project video interviews being undertaken in collaboration with the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). • The current UTSA-funded video interview project is being recorded and completed according to NPS standards for documenting to allow for future use. • Existing collections are stored within the historic Blackwell School buildings and the Marfa and Presidio County Museum. • Most of the archives related to the Blackwell School held by the BSA have been digitized, but there is a backlog on digitizing older audio oral histories. • Most of the known historic photos of the school building are part of the Marfa and Presidio County Museum's Nancy Keith Collection and the Duncan Collection; the National Park Service needs to formally receive permissions for future use. • The BSA website includes professional photos and a virtual museum created when the building was closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. • Current exhibits in the historic school include donated museum items including leather jackets, report cards, and additional objects. Trends • Additional interest in donating Blackwell School items to the National Park Service exists.
Threats and Opportunities	Threats • Former students and families are aging and may have moved away from Marfa, which could make it hard to capture additional oral histories. • No yearbooks or class rosters exist for Blackwell School, and it will be difficult to create a comprehensive list of former students. • Items displayed in the historic buildings may be exposed to light and low humidity levels that could damage objects. • Some images previously used on the Blackwell School website and exhibits may require additional compliance and permissions before being able to be used on NPS sites and would not be publicly available for a period of time.

Fundamental Resource or Value	Personal Stories, Archives, and Collections
Threats and Opportunities	Opportunities • Oral histories and archives may also cover the historic buildings' role as a vocational school. • The National Park Service could proactively work on releases when collecting oral histories. • Potential exists for Blackwell School National Historic Site and Fort Davis National Historic Site to share curatorial positions or support. • An oral historian funded through partnerships could coordinate future interviews. • Community archival events would bring additional stories and items to the park to be documented. • Special events including reunions would be great opportunities to gather additional information from alumni. • Blackwell School National Historic Site could work with other sites for fuller interpretation and thematic interpretation. • Interpretive materials and signage could be presented in English and Spanish. • The National Park Service could work with partners or contract a project for bulk scanning and digitizing of existing oral histories. • The park could partner with local galleries and museums to create additional exhibits or displays. • Historic photos could be used to create innovative exhibits that portray students at the Blackwell School and recreate educational scenes. • Local and university partners may be able to provide archival support or storage.
Existing Data and Plans Related to the FRV	• Oral histories
Data and/or GIS Needs	• Scope of collections statement • Digital content strategy • Philanthropic partnership agreement • Community outreach and engagement strategy • Partnership strategy • Oral history strategy • Collection condition assessment
Planning Needs	• Blackwell School management vision • Comprehensive interpretive plan • Collection management plan • Exhibit plan • Integrated pest management plan • Historic furnishing plan • Housekeeping plan

Fundamental Resource or Value	Personal Stories, Archives, and Collections
Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the FRV, and NPS Policy-level Guidance	Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the FRV • National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 • Museum Properties Management Act of 1955, as amended • "Disposition of Federal Records" (36 CFR 1228) • "Disposal of Records" (44 USC 3301 et seq.) • "Federal Records: General" (36 CFR 1220) • Federal Records Act of 1950 • "Preservation, Arrangement, Duplication, Exhibition of Records (44 USC 2109) • "Curation of Federally-Owned and Administered Archaeological Collections" (36 CFR 79) • National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended • Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974, as amended • Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979, as amended • National Park Omnibus Management Act of 1998 • Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 USC 3001) • Executive Order 13175, "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments" NPS Policy-level Guidance (NPS Management Policies 2006 and Director's Orders) • NPS Management Policies 2006 (ch. 5) "Cultural Resource Management" • NPS Management Policies 2006 (sec. 4.2) "Studies and Collections" • NPS Management Policies 2006 (sec. 8.10) "Natural and Cultural Studies, Research, and Collection Activities" • Director's Order 24: <i>NPS Museum Collections Management</i> • Director's Order 28: <i>Cultural Resource Management</i> • Director's Order 28A: <i>Archeology</i> • "NPS-28, Cultural Resource Management Guideline" • NPS Museum Handbook, parts I, II, and III • <i>The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation</i>



Fundamental Resource or Value	Community Connections and Partnerships
Related Significance Statements	Significance statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6
Current Conditions and Trends	Conditions • Prior to the establishment of Blackwell School National Historic Site, the BSA operated the school as a museum space; volunteers opened the building to the public on weekends. • In 2019, the BSA partnered with the Borderland Collective to create a downtown Marfa walking tour featuring historic photographs and audio interpretation available via an app. • On July 17, 2024, the school was officially transferred from Marfa ISD to the National Park Service. • The BSA organized annual block parties for neighbors and alumni. • The National Park Conservation Association (NPCA) supported the designation of the site and provided funding for additional BSA administrative support. • Other partners that previously worked with the BSA for preservation of Blackwell School include the National Park Foundation, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), UTSA, the Marfa Visitor Center, and the Marfa and Presidio County Museum. Trends • Since the 1970s, many of the Blackwell School families have moved away from Marfa. • The city of Marfa has experienced a drastic shift in demographics since gaining a reputation as a center for art tourism.
Threats and Opportunities	Threats • Many Blackwell School families and alumni have moved away from Marfa, making it more difficult to reach out to former Blackwell students and their descendants and to ensure they are included in site and interpretive planning and associated events. • The changing demographics of Marfa have included a shift toward seasonal residents and short-term rentals. • The high cost of living and running a business in Marfa makes it difficult for alumni and younger generations of Blackwell families to stay local. • Enrollment in Marfa ISD is dwindling. • It may be hard to recruit local volunteers or friend group members due to the dropping full-time population. • Craftspeople with adobe expertise are becoming more difficult to find. Opportunities • Interpretive materials and signage could be presented in English and Spanish. • Mobilizing descendants and younger generations of Blackwell families could support ongoing community involvement. • Communication with the surrounding Hispanic community would enrich future interpretation by reflecting broader and contemporary community priorities in historical interpretation. • Blackwell School National Historic Site could also convey Marfa history to educate visitors who may not know the area's history outside the art community. • Blackwell School National Historic Site staff could share administrative space with other nearby federal agencies.

Fundamental Resource or Value	Community Connections and Partnerships
Threats and Opportunities	Opportunities (continued) • Staff could be recruited locally, fostering local investment in the site's interpretation and creating economic opportunities through workforce development programs, internships, and educational programs. • There could be a volunteer community ambassador to help connect locals to the new NPS unit. • Neighborhood events co-developed with community members and hosted or organized by the National Park Service could help connect locals to the site. • Establishing a mechanism to elicit regular feedback to refine interpretive content and visitor services would create an adaptive approach that could respond to changing community interests and evolving visitor and stakeholder needs.
Existing Data and Plans Related to the FRV	• NPCA Blackwell Blueprint (October 2024 workshop)
Data and/or GIS Needs	• Visitor use study • Digital content strategy • Philanthropic partnership agreement • Concurrent jurisdiction agreement with the City of Marfa • Community outreach and engagement strategy • Market research study • Cooperating association agreement • Partnership strategy • Oral history strategy
Planning Needs	• Blackwell School management vision • Comprehensive interpretive plan • Physical security plan • Emergency action plan • Exhibit plan
Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the FRV, and NPS Policy-level Guidance	Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the FRV • National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended • Executive Order 11593, "Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment" • "Protection of Historic Properties" (36 CFR 800) NPS Policy-level Guidance (NPS Management Policies 2006 and Director's Orders) • NPS Management Policies 2006 (sec. 5.10) "Partnerships" • NPS Management Policies 2006 (ch. 5) "Cultural Resource Management" • Director's Order 6: <i>Interpretation and Education</i> • Director's Order 23: <i>Cultural Resource Management</i> • <i>The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes</i> • <i>Programmatic Agreement among the National Park Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Council of State Historic Preservation Officers (2008)</i>

Analysis of Other Important Resources and Values

Other Important Resource or Value	Community Park and Playground
Current Conditions and Trends	Conditions • In 2009, the City of Marfa received grant funding to develop a 0.3-acre park on the ISD-owned property at Blackwell School. The Outdoor Recreation Grant funded by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department supported the installation of picnic tables with grills, benches, a playground, and a butterfly garden. • Prior to the NPS unit's establishment, the City of Marfa previously leased the park land from Marfa ISD and maintained the grounds and equipment. The park grounds are within the Blackwell School National Historic Site's legislated boundary. • The park is often used for family events including birthday parties and reunions. • Little information is documented on when the "Bienvenidos Amigos y Vecinos / Welcome Friends and Neighbors" mural was painted on the park amphitheater or its artist. Trends • Shifting demographics and increased interest in Marfa as an arts community has spurred development in Marfa. • The Blackwell Park is one of the only remaining public green spaces in South Marfa.
Threats and Opportunities	Threats • After-hours illegal activities within the park boundaries could threaten staff or visitor safety. • No restrooms are available to those using the park or playground. • Lack of NPS law enforcement could allow illegal activities on NPS grounds. Opportunities • Regular events offering activities and food trucks could bring more neighbors and Marfa locals to the park. • Special events such as outdoor concerts, festivals, and other community gatherings could bring additional interest and people to the space. • The community space and playground provide opportunities to reach audiences that may not otherwise come to a NPS site. • Interpretive signs can connect Blackwell School history to the current playground landscape. • A partnership between the City of Marfa Police and Presidio County Sheriff's Office could be developed to continue law enforcement coverage of the property.
Data and/or GIS Needs	• Visitor use study • Market research study • Special landscape study • Concurrent jurisdiction agreement with the City of Marfa • History of amphitheater mural
Planning Needs	• Blackwell School management vision • Physical security plan • Emergency action plan • Agreement between the City of Marfa Police and Presidio County Sheriff's Office

Other Important Resource or Value	Community Park and Playground
Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the OIRV, and NPS Policy-level Guidance	Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the OIRV - Architectural Barriers Act (Public Law 90-480) NPS Policy-level Guidance (<i>NPS Management Policies 2006</i> and <i>Director's Orders</i>) <i>NPS Management Policies 2006</i> (sec. 5.10) "Partnerships" <i>NPS Management Policies 2006</i> (ch. 5) "Cultural Resource Management" - Director's Order 6: <i>Interpretation and Education</i> - Director's Order 23: <i>Cultural Resource Management</i> <i>The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes</i> <i>Programmatic Agreement among the National Park Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Council of State Historic Preservation Officers (2008)</i>



Other Important Resource or Value	Dark Skies
Current Conditions and Trends	Conditions • Presidio County is part of the peripheral area of the Greater Big Bend International Dark Sky Reserve, which was designated in 2022 and spans the United States–Mexico international border. • The county is updating its outdoor lighting. • The core area of the designated reserve includes the Nature Conservancy’s Davis Mountains Preserve and the McDonald Observatory. • The reserve encompasses Big Bend National Park, Big Bend Ranch State Park Complex, Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, Chinati Mountains State Natural Area, Elephant Mountains Wildlife Management Area, Davis Mountain State Park, and Fort Davis National Historic Site. • Counties within the designated reserve have supported low-light actions including updating outdoor lighting ordinances; collecting and compiling sky quality data; inventorying, documenting, and improving lighting; and educating the public about the importance of dark night sky preservation. Trends • Interest in astrotourism events is increasing among local communities, elected officials, and visitors in West Texas.
Threats and Opportunities	Threats • Incompatible outdoor lighting at the schoolhouse, park, and future visitor infrastructure could impact dark night skies at the historic site. • Incompatible adjacent development could introduce additional lighting that impacts dark skies. • Balancing the site’s lighting needs to support safety and security may be difficult with dark sky standards. Opportunities • Blackwell School National Historic Site can work with the NPS Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division to improve night sky resources, increase opportunities for stargazing, and address light pollution.
Data and/or GIS Needs	• Visual resource inventory
Planning Needs	• None identified
Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the OIRV, and NPS Policy-level Guidance	Laws, Executive Orders, and Regulations That Apply to the OIRV • National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 • Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 • Clean Air Act of 1963 NPS Policy-level Guidance (NPS Management Policies 2006 and Director’s Orders) • NPS Management Policies 2006 (sec. 4.10) “Lightscape Management” • Director’s Order 50C: <i>Public Risk Management Program</i>

Identification of Key Issues and Associated Planning and Data Needs

This section considers key issues to be addressed in planning and management and therefore takes a broader view over the primary focus of part 1. A key issue focuses on a question that is important for a park. Key issues often raise questions regarding park purpose and significance and fundamental and other important resources and values. For example, a key issue may pertain to the potential for a fundamental or other important resource or value in a park to be detrimentally affected by discretionary management decisions. A key issue may also address crucial questions that are not directly related to purpose and significance, but which still affect them indirectly. Usually, a key issue is one that a future planning effort or data collection needs to address and requires a decision by NPS managers.

The following are key issues for Blackwell School National Historic Site and the associated planning and data needs to address them:

- **Transition to NPS Management and Operations.** Blackwell School National Historic Site was officially established on July 22, 2024, with the transfer of the property from Marfa ISD to the National Park Service. While the site is now federally owned, major decisions still need to be made about its future management. Formal agreements are needed to establish a philanthropic friends group, outline site protection responsibilities and jurisdiction, and guide the transition of operations from the Blackwell School Alliance to the National Park Service.

Need also exists to determine how the National Park Service will operate visitor contact and facilities at the school site. The park will share management with Fort Davis National Historic Site but will have dedicated Blackwell School National Historic Site staff who will require office and administrative space as well as convenient housing within commuting distance. Site planning needs to consider priority facility projects and ways to enhance visitor experience, flow, and parking within the NPS boundary to manage a potential increase in visitation. Museum baseline documentation will guide what will be included in the NPS collection and where the collection will be stored, which could involve additional partnership or cooperative agreements.

- *Associated planning needs:* Blackwell School management vision, comprehensive/strategic interpretive plan, physical security plan, emergency action plan, collection management plan, exhibit plan, housekeeping plan
- *Associated data needs:* special landscape study, scope of collection statement, collection condition assessment, philanthropic partnership agreement, concurrent jurisdiction agreement with City of Marfa / Presidio County, facility management strategic investment plan, workforce analysis, cooperating association agreement

- **Truthful Interpretation.** The Blackwell School represents a difficult period of history, and dealing directly and sensitively with conversations surrounding racial segregation and identity is central to the purpose and significance of the national historic site. It is the National Park Service’s responsibility to tell a balanced story that reflects the varied experiences of students and their families and provides opportunities for staff to interpret and visitors to learn. Interpretive planning will guide the development of exhibits and how the physical resources can support interpretation in the historic building and outreach sites.

- *Associated planning needs:* comprehensive/strategic interpretive plan, exhibit plan
- *Associated data needs:* visitor use study, digital content strategy, community outreach and engagement strategy, market research study, oral history strategy, partnership strategy

- **Outreach and Engagement as a Unit of the National Park System.** The Blackwell School has long been associated with the nonprofit the Blackwell School Alliance and former owner Marfa ISD; as a new unit of the national park system, the site needs to transition to NPS branding and identity. The National Park Service should work toward educating the local community about the importance of the designation and what the change in management means in terms of operations. Increasing public awareness, site promotion, and visibility—as well as strengthening the connection to other units that interpret the history of segregation in the United States—will help drive visitation and convey a deeper understanding of the site’s importance. A robust outreach program can support volunteer opportunities and other partnerships.

Blackwell School National Historic Site needs the continued involvement of Blackwell alumni and consistent outreach to its descendant community to ensure those with a connection to the school remain engaged. Collecting visitor data, facilitating community conversations about the future of the national historic site, and creating outreach and community engagement strategies will guide how to effectively engage with the general public.

- *Associated planning needs:* comprehensive/strategic interpretive plan, exhibit plan
- *Associated data needs:* visitor use study, digital content strategy, community outreach and engagement strategy, market research study, partnership strategy



Planning and Data Needs

To maintain connection to the core elements of the foundation and the importance of these core foundation elements, the planning and data needs listed here are directly related to protecting fundamental resources and values, park significance, and park purpose, as well as addressing key issues. To successfully undertake a planning effort, information from sources such as inventories, studies, research activities, and analyses may be required to provide adequate knowledge of park resources and visitor information. Such information sources have been identified as data needs and presented in the first table below; planning needs follow in the second.

Items considered of the utmost importance were identified as high priority, and other items identified, but not rising to the level of high priority, were listed as either medium- or low-priority needs. These priorities inform park management efforts to secure funding and support for planning projects.

Planning Needs – Where A Decision-Making Process Is Needed			
Related to an FRV, OIRV, or Key Issue?	Planning Needs	Priority (H, M, L)	Notes
FRV, OIRV, Key Issue	Blackwell School management vision	H	A management vision for Blackwell School would include visitor circulation and access through the schoolhouse and grounds, potential infrastructure improvements, visitor capacity, desired conditions, and high-level programming of space to support future exhibit and historic furnishings development, as well as use of the property as a community space. This vision would meet applicable general management plan statutory requirements and include appropriate environmental compliance. Any comprehensive planning effort or smaller planning effort that supports the portfolio approach to management planning also needs to involve an interpretive specialist in planning discussions due to the small space being discussed within the existing historic structures.
FRV, Key Issue	Comprehensive/strategic interpretive plan	H	Interpretive planning is needed to support the development of a park unigrid, outreach efforts, associated curriculum, and on-site and virtual interpretation. A strategic approach can elicit stakeholder engagement in the development process and would identify next steps/projects to support.

Planning Needs – Where A Decision-Making Process Is Needed			
Related to an FRV, OIRV, or Key Issue?	Planning Needs	Priority (H, M, L)	Notes
FRV, Key Issue	Physical security plan	H	A physical security plan identifies external threats that can inform law enforcement agreements and would include recommendations for site lighting and other security features related to the physical structure.
FRV, Key Issue	Emergency action plan	H	An emergency action plan is needed to identify staff and visitor safety measures as well as processes for continuing operations and protecting museum items stored in the facility in the face of emergency events.
FRV	Structural fire management plan	H	A structural fire management plan provides focused guidance for fire suppression systems and actions.
FRV, Key Issue	Collection management plan	H	Part of museum collection baseline documents, a collection management plan is needed to determine where the NPS collection will be stored and guide future management, acquisitions, and conservation. This document follows the development of a scope of collection statement.
FRV, Key Issue	Exhibit plan	M	Facility needs, preservation needs, and visitor desired opportunities and experiences should be addressed prior to exhibit planning focused on the use of collection items in professionally designed exhibit space in the historic buildings.
FRV	Integrated pest management plan	L	Integrated pest management planning focuses on long-term prevention and common-sense strategies to combat pests within the historic structures, visitor facilities, and grounds.
FRV	Historic furnishing plan	L	A historic furnishing plan would provide guidance on which historic or interpretive items can be installed in the schoolhouse and band hall to support interpretation.
FRV	Housekeeping plan	L	A museum housekeeping plan provides a framework for consistent care of museum objects. This plan is required for every space that houses NPS museum collections.

Data Needs – Where Information Is Needed Before Decisions Can Be Made			
Related to an FRV, OIRV, or Key Issue?	Data and GIS Needs	Priority (H, M, L)	Notes
FRV, OIRV, Key Issue	Visitor use study	H	A visitor use study would help the National Park Service and partners understand the current visitor types and level of use at the site and include a survey component intended to reveal the motivations/interests of visitors or prospective visitors. The study would identify potential audiences for the historic site and consider different strategies to enhance exposure of Blackwell's history to surrounding communities. Visitor experience analysis and related market research using visitor study data is needed to guide general management and to guide planning for visitor experience and interpretive design of the site. This process, along with any comprehensive planning, needs to align the local community, descendants, and stakeholders with NPS unit goals and guide messaging. Collaboration with the NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program could help collect data and produce a useful final product.
FRV, OIRV, Key Issue	Market research study	H	This study, which is underway at the time of this foundation document development, will evaluate local and regional demographics, destinations, and recreation trends to anticipate future visitation at Blackwell, as well as identify prospective visitor types (market segments) that share common traits, behaviors, and motivations. Outcomes of this research will inform forthcoming planning and facility investments by anticipating visitor types and levels and corresponding needs and interests.
FRV, Key Issue	Special landscape study	H	What remains of the historic landscape at the park is not a contributing feature to the significance of the Blackwell School. The vast majority of the historic 5-acre campus has been altered, and the existing playground is not historic. Nevertheless, landscape treatment recommendations are needed to maximize visitor appreciation of the site and to ensure treatments are compatible with the historic scene.

Data Needs – Where Information Is Needed Before Decisions Can Be Made			
Related to an FRV, OIRV, or Key Issue?	Data and GIS Needs	Priority (H, M, L)	Notes
FRV, Key Issue	Scope of collection statement	H	A scope of collection statement is needed to guide NPS collection/acquisitions and donations. An agreement between the BSA and NPS is in place to create this statement based on legislation and the existing BSA collection.
FRV, Key Issue	Digital content strategy	H	A digital content strategy is now required under Director's Order 70 for all park units wanting to engage through social media. The document, which could be phased, would include information on messaging, how and where messages are shared, social media platforms, and a calendar for regular digital content and engagement.
FRV, OIRV, Key Issue	Philanthropic partnership agreement	H	A philanthropic partnership agreement is needed to formalize fundraising capacity between the NPS unit and the nonprofit BSA.
Key Issue	Concurrent jurisdiction agreement with City of Marfa / Presidio County	H	A formal agreement outlining how law enforcement agencies will share jurisdiction is needed to support safety and law enforcement activities within the legislated park boundary.
FRV, Key Issue	Facility management strategic investment plan	H	A strategic investment plan is needed to sequence and prioritize facility projects; this type of planning effort results in Project Management Information System (PMIS) statements that can be used to request NPS funding and create sustainable infrastructure investment strategies.
FRV, Key Issue	Workforce analysis	H	This analysis would define shared staffing responsibilities and outline how Fort Davis and Blackwell School National Historic Sites will be staffed, the location of staff, and the need to address education and outreach capacity.
FRV, OIRV, Key Issue	Community outreach and engagement strategy	H	NPS RTCA and BSA can collaborate to create an effective and meaningful strategy for outreach and engagement.

Data Needs – Where Information Is Needed Before Decisions Can Be Made			
Related to an FRV, OIRV, or Key Issue?	Data and GIS Needs	Priority (H, M, L)	Notes
FRV, Key Issue	Oral history strategy	H	A formalized strategy would identify gaps in the existing oral history catalog and potential individuals to be interviewed in future. This document could guide future oral history projects and provide management and preservation guidance for physical and digital archives.
Key Issue	Cooperating association agreement	M	A cooperating association agreement is needed for a partnering organization to sell merchandise within the NPS unit.
FRV, Key Issue	Partnership strategy	M	A strategy is needed to identify individual strengths of potential NPS partners and strategic opportunities in the broader partner landscape. This strategy can be used to build a stakeholder coalition that will lead to a partnership workshop after the document's completion.
FRV, Key Issue	Collection condition assessment	L	As one of the NPS museum collection baseline documents, this assessment would be done once a collection survey and scope of collection statement is complete.
FRV	Digital 3D modeling/photo/ lidar of school and band hall	L	Additional photo documentation of the historic structures would support the special landscape study and future restoration or rehabilitation efforts.
FRV, OIRV	Visual resource inventory	L	Associated with the Dark Skies OIRV and the Historic Structures and Grounds FRV, a visual resource inventory would document significant views and values associated with those resources. This documentation could support NPS efforts to mitigate incompatible development and the existing Dark Sky designation.
OIRV	History of amphitheater mural	L	Little documentation is associated with the “Bienvenidos Amigos y Vecinos / Welcome Friends and Neighbors” mural on the Blackwell Park amphitheater. Additional information about the creation of mural and who was involved could inform future conservation and historic documentation.

Part 3: Contributors

Blackwell School National Historic Site / Fort Davis National Historic Site

David Larson, Superintendent (former)

Savannah Balderas, Visual Information Specialist Intern

Al Gonzalez, Volunteer

James Olds, Supervisory Facilities Operations Specialist, Superintendent (acting)

Chelsea Rios, Chief of Interpretation

Victoria Villarreal, Visual Information Specialist Intern

NPS Interior Regions 6, 7, 8

Kristen Fox, Architect and Project Manager, Regional Facilities

Gibran Lule-Hurtado, Community Planner, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

Ardrianna McLane, Regional Program Manager for Interpretation, Education, Youth & Volunteers (former)

Dan Niosi, Regional Planning and Environmental Quality Division Manager

Becky Rinas, Regional Planner (former)

Barbara Scott, Regional Interpretive Specialist

Angela Sirna, Regional Historian

Maria Trevino, Community Planner, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

Other NPS Staff

Andrew Ferrell, Deputy Director, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training

John Paul Jones, Visual Information Specialist, Denver Service Center, Planning Division

Charles Lawson, Project Manager, Denver Service Center, Planning Division

Hilary Retseck, Cultural Resource Specialist, Denver Service Center, Planning Division

Carrin Rich, Contract Editor, Denver Service Center, Planning Division

Subject Matter Experts and Partners

Nancy Aguirre, Associate Professor of History, The Citadel

Avery Armstrong, Program Administrator, Center for Texas Music History, Texas State University

Victoria Contreras, Archivist, Archives of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University

Sheena Cox, Historic Architectural Easement Monitor, Texas Historical Commission

Maribel Falcon, Librarian for Latino Studies at the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin

Daniel O. Hernandez, President, Blackwell School Alliance

Cristobal Lopez, Texas Field Representative, National Parks Conservation Association

John Lujan, Vice President, Blackwell School Alliance

John Mckiernan-Gonzalez, Associate Professor and Director of the Center for the Study of the Southwest, Texas State University

Betty Nunez Aguirre, Director, Blackwell School Alliance

Claudio Nunez, Blackwell School Alumnus

Carlos F. Ortega, Lecturer Emeritus of Chicano Studies, University of Texas at El Paso

Frank G. Pérez, Professor of Communication and Chicano Studies, University of Texas at El Paso

Mario Rivera, Director, Blackwell School Alliance

Rosela Rivera, Chief Financial Officer, Marfa Independent School District

Jessi Silva, Member, Blackwell School Alliance

Martha Stafford, Blackwell School Alliance / National Parks Conservation Association

Dennis Vasquez, Director, Blackwell School Alliance

Michael Wallens, Member, Blackwell School Alliance

Mary Williams, Board President, Marfa and Presidio County Museum

Appendixes

Appendix A: Enabling Legislation for Blackwell School National Historic Site

Public Law 117–206
117th Congress

An Act

To establish the Blackwell School National Historic Site in Marfa, Texas, and
for other purposes.

Oct. 17, 2022
[S. 2490]

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of
the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

Blackwell School
National Historic
Site Act.
54 USC 320101
note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Blackwell School National Historic Site Act”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

(1) the Blackwell School, located at 501 South Abbott Street, in Marfa, Presidio County, Texas, is—

(A) associated with the period of racial segregation in Marfa public schools; and

(B) the only extant property directly associated with Hispanic education in Marfa since the other buildings were torn down after the Blackwell School closed in 1965;

(2) the Blackwell School is a tangible reminder of the period during which the doctrine of “separate but equal” dominated education and social systems;

(3) despite being categorized as “white” by Texas law, Mexican Americans were regularly excluded from commingling with Anglo individuals at barbershops, restaurants, funeral homes, theaters, churches, and schools;

(4) the spectrum of experiences of students and teachers at the Blackwell School are an important record of life in a segregated school in the context of the history of Texas and the United States;

(5) Mexican and Mexican American culture and history in Marfa is tied to the Blackwell School, which for more than 50 years served as a leading feature of the Hispanic community, illustrating the challenge of maintaining cultural identity in a dominant Anglo society;

(6) Hispanic influences continue to be seen in social and religious organizations, business and government institutions, and shared experiences of language, food, and music in Marfa, Texas;

(7) the historic Blackwell School building is a physical record of—

(A) the longevity and beauty of the distinctive design and craftsmanship informed by traditional techniques and materials; and

(B) the transition from the purely vernacular to the period of materials, design, and workmanship made available after the arrival of the railroad;

(8) the original historic school building and grounds on which the Blackwell School building stands provide an authentic setting to commemorate and interpret the history of the Blackwell School;

(9) the Blackwell School is closely associated with the broad patterns of local, State, and national history in the area of school segregation; and

(10) Mexicans and other members of the Latin American diaspora have placed a high value on education as a means of economic, social, and political advancement, but Hispanics and Latinos have not always had equitable opportunities and access to quality educational facilities in the United States.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) MAP.—The term “map” means the map entitled “Blackwell School National Historic Site Proposed Boundary”, numbered 593/178387, and dated February 2022.

(2) NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.—The term “National Historic Site” means the Blackwell School National Historic Site established by section 4(a)(1).

(3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of the Interior.

SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BLACKWELL SCHOOL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (2), there is established the Blackwell School National Historic Site in the State of Texas as a unit of the National Park System to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit of present and future generations the Blackwell School, including—

(A) the role of the Blackwell School as an academic and cultural cornerstone in Marfa, Texas; and

(B) the function of the Blackwell School within a segregated system of education in Texas and the United States from the period of 1885 through 1965.

(2) DETERMINATION BY SECRETARY.—The National Historic Site shall not be established until the date on which the Secretary determines that—

(A) a written agreement has been entered into by the Secretary with the Marfa Unified School District providing that the Blackwell School shall be donated to the United States or co-managed with the Secretary for inclusion in a national historic site to be managed consistently with the purposes of a national historic site; and

(B) a sufficient quantity of land or an interest in land within the boundaries of the National Historic Site has been acquired to constitute a manageable unit.

(b) MAP.—

(1) BOUNDARIES.—The boundaries of the National Historic Site shall be the boundaries generally depicted on the map.

(2) AVAILABILITY OF MAP.—The map shall be on file and available for public inspection in the appropriate offices of the National Park Service.

(c) ACQUISITION OF AUTHORITY.—The Secretary may only acquire any land or interest in land located within the boundary of the National Historic Site by—

- (1) donation;
- (2) purchase with donated funds; or
- (3) exchange.

(d) ADMINISTRATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall administer the National Historic Site in accordance with—

- (A) this Act; and
- (B) the laws generally applicable to units of the National Park System.

(2) MANAGEMENT PLAN.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 3 years after the date on which funds are first made available to the Secretary to prepare a general management plan for the National Historic Site, the Secretary shall prepare a general management plan for the National Historic Site in accordance with section 100502 of title 54, United States Code.

Deadline.

(B) SUBMISSION.—On completion of the general management plan under subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives the general management plan prepared under that subparagraph.

(e) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—The Secretary shall enter into cooperative agreements with the Blackwell School Alliance and other local, regional, State, academic, and nonprofit partners for interpretive and educational programming, technical assistance, and rehabilitation relating to the National Historic Site.

Contracts.

(f) WRITTEN CONSENT OF OWNER.—No private property or non-Federal public property shall be included within the boundaries of the National Historic Site or managed as part of the National Historic Site without the written consent of the owner of the property.

Approved October 17, 2022.

**DOI Interior Regions 6, 7, and 8 Foundation Document Recommendation
Blackwell School National Historic Site**

May 2025

This Foundation Document has been prepared as a collaborative effort between park and regional staff and is recommended for approval by the DOI Interior Regions 6, 7, and 8 Regional Director.

JAMES OLDS Digitally signed by JAMES OLDS
Date: 2025.05.05 09:26:31
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RECOMMENDED

James Olds, Acting Superintendent, Blackwell School National Historic Site

Date

**BRIAN
CARLSTROM** Digitally signed by BRIAN
CARLSTROM
Date: 2025.05.13 12:22:09 -06'00'

APPROVED

Brian Carlstrom, Acting Regional Director, DOI Interior Regions 6, 7, and 8

Date



As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historic places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

BLSC 593/195701

May 2025

Foundation Document • Blackwell School National Historic Site

