

# Honoring and Celebrating Culture and Communities

**OBJECTIVE:** We need to acknowledge and tell the full story of Durham’s rich culture, history, and the strength of its communities, particularly Indigenous, Black, and Hispanic/Latino communities. We need to recognize that a community is built by the contributions of all its people and that honest public history is not just a record of wealth and privilege. We need to preserve and create physical evidence of that history in our community so that Durham’s residents—particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents—can see their past, present, and future reflected in this place. We need to recognize Durham’s historic buildings and places as living artifacts of our shared public history and thoughtfully preserve them to enrich our future. We need to empower residents to tell the stories of their own cultures and history, and combat systems that benefit from erasure or minimization of that history.

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**BACKGROUND:** Although the City of Durham was incorporated in 1869, communities have inhabited this place for far longer. Prior to settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples, including the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation and the Eno, lived and thrived in what we now call Durham. Settler colonialism violently disrupted a healthy state of relationships and systems based around the caretaking of the land, all life, and each other. On this stolen land, white landowners built wealth by enslaving people of African ancestry in race-based chattel slavery. Formerly enslaved people, including those from Stagville, used kinship and community, forged in bondage, to build the foundations of the Durham we know today. Amid the pressures of the White supremacist Jim Crow South, Black residents made Durham a haven for Black business, community, and culture. In the 1960s, our local government’s broken promise of “urban renewal” destroyed or damaged the thriving Black communities of Hayti, Hickstown, and Crest Street, leaving Highway 147 where homes and businesses once stood. Since then, local government and private development have often divested from historically Black neighborhoods and excluded Black residents from important decisions. In the last few decades, Latinos and other immigrants have become part of the fabric of the Durham community. Today, Durham is advertised to newcomers in ways that omit these histories or tout diversity without benefiting or supporting residents of color. Residents recognize that we cannot have meaningful conversations about land use and Durham’s future without understanding our history and where we have been.

We want to celebrate the stories of our community elders, the cultures of Indigenous peoples on whose land we reside, and achievements of our Black residents. We want to acknowledge past wrongs, actively work to right them, and support communities telling their own stories.

## Quotes from Durham Residents

“I don’t want to be a plaque, this is where Black people used to live, it’s like we’re a dying breed and it shouldn’t be that way”

“what made these black neighborhoods special is that they literally came off of a plantation and built the communities themselves”

“race, making sure people of color are recognized, acknowledged and taken care of in the city of Durham”

“Durham was a safe haven for Black people. now largely living in poverty. no jobs, transportation. something drastic happened. Urban renewal-147 did this. broken promises made to Black people”

“Remember the legacy by taking care of the ancestors; Bull City was Built by hands of our ancestors, continue their legacy by ensuring their descendants voices are heard and needs are met. #BullCityLegacy”

“People who have grown up in other communities should have access to afford to move back into these communities after development.”

“Durham used to be a safe haven for p.o.c to have a dream or an opportunity for better quality of life”

“Durham needs to honor the historical contribution of African Americans in a real tangible way that center equity in any major plans and respects native Durham voice and experiences”

“It gets to the heart of one of Durham's oldest problems...that being lack of attention to communities of color, especially the Black community, who helped to build Durham from the ground up. Our ancestors worked at the tobacco factories, the chicken processing plants, and in the homes of Durham's wealthy land and yes, slave owners to build this city. It should be embarrassing to city leaders to have ignored our communities to the extent they have, which has led to communities such as McDougald Terrace and others who are living in less than substandard conditions just a few miles from properties that they cannot afford to live in, yet their fore parents made it possible for Durham to "thrive" while they can barely "survive."