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the Marion County
Cultural Heritage
Assets Mapping Project
(CHAMP)

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Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History presents ...

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🏆 Marion County CHAMP Report: 🏆 African-American Communities

Community Focus: African-American Communities across Marion Co.
For more: marionvoices.org/CHAMP



This report details community feedback, findings, & discussions from our June 16th, 2024 Marion County African-American Communities CHAMP Session, held at MLK Park in Marion City. Report findings are ultimately only reflective of the participants at each session; but provide a useful starting place for thinking about future investments in arts, culture, & community in Marion County!

Thank you to all who participated in the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping process!



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Marion County CHAMP Report: African-American Communities

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Session Summary & Participants: African-American Communities -- Marion, Ohio

Our Marion County African-American Communities Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Session was held in June 2024 in Marion, Ohio at MLK Park. This well-attended & lively session drew a gathering of eight participants -- seven African-American, & one white ally, & all of the Baby Boom generation -- alongside two Marion Voices team members. Participants overwhelmingly had grown up on Marion's historically-Black West Side, or had strong personal, familial, cultural, or spiritual connections to the West Side. Mapped cultural assets, accordingly, focused on the West Side: allowing this session, unique amongst all CHAMP sessions, to become more of a micro-neighborhood cultural heritage assets mapping project. This tight focus on a particular, significant neighborhood allowed participants to share their life stories & work experiences on the West Side; to mourn the loss of significant neighborhood institutions, & to individually & collectively vision for futures of the neighborhood, & for people of color across Marion County. Compared to all other sessions, participants in this CHAMP session identified structural & systemic barriers, policy, & infrastructure that resulted in the loss of African-American community on the West Side, & set a course for both structural & grassroots change to bring back the legacy of the West Side as a Black City-within-a-City; & a space for cultural legacy.

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Cultural heritage assets mapping projects lead to lists // directories of cultural assets organized by community, as well as lots of good ideas about how to better activate, network, & build on our resources. They often also surface projects & demands for funding: community needs that Marion Voices can bring to municipal, non-profit, & philanthropic leaders as a part of our advocacy efforts to grow arts- & culture-based economies for Marion County.

In short: your ideas & contributions will help us build more just, more abundant futures for everyone in Marion County ... starting with our diverse local heritages! **Let's goooo!**

Cultural Assets Mapping Resources, Thank-Yous, & Citations

We are grateful to a number of municipal, non-profit, & community Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Projects across the country for sharing resources, guides, & materials, which helped our Marion Voices team develop our folklife & cultural arts-based Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project kit, facilitation plan, & materials! We are especially grateful to the City of Austin's Cultural Assets Mapping Project (CAMP) & CAMP Kit, which served as a model for this packet!

Thank you to our funders, the **Ohio Arts Council**, **Ohio Humanities**, **National Endowment for the Arts**, & private Marion Voices donors, for helping to make the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping process possible for Marion County! Additional thanks to the **America-250 Ohio Semiquincentennial Commission** for support for the project's next phase: the North-Central Ohio Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project, helping bridge this work with our regional neighbors!

Project Team -- Credits & Acknowledgements: Jess Lamar Reece Holler -- Project Director, Lead Facilitator & Analyst, Graphic Design; Jeff Nagle -- Maps, Session Notes, Graphic Design, & Research; Johnnie Jackson -- Outreach & Strategic Lead; Danlaly Pavón -- Translation, Interpretation, & Language Justice; CHAMP Community Liaisons -- Irene Tron (Western Marion County), Danlaly Pavón & Evelyn Olivios Lisecki (Latine Communities); Ms. Linda Sims & Ms. Katie Reese-Hairston (Marion City & Suburbs); Ms. Jessie Thompson (African-American Communities); Shannon Pegg & the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition (Queer/Trans* Communities); April Morrison & Cody Higley (Eastern Marion County); Tim Gorenflo & Susan Ann Rhodes (Southern Marion County).

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Thank you for being CHAMPs for Marion County Culture!



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What is cultural heritage assets mapping?

Cultural heritage assets mapping is a tried-&-true participatory process used in communities across the United States & world to guide communities in identifying our cultural, historic, arts, natural, & community resources; & making plans for their protection. Cultural heritage assets mapping projects can surface what we have in our community -- cultural heritage assets. Knowing what we have is the first step in organizing & advocating together to better invest in these resources. Cultural heritage assets mapping can also identify resources we used to have, & lost -- & can lead to important discuss about why those losses occurred, how we can repair them, & how we can build different futures that reflect all histories & meet the needs of all community members. **Our goal is to set a blueprint for our county's cultural futures!**

What is a cultural heritage asset?

Cultural heritage assets are resources related to arts, culture, or heritage that are present in our communities & on the landscape. Some cultural heritage assets can be mapped -- physical locations, for example. Others -- what folklorists call "intangible cultural heritages" -- may be connected to a place in a more abstract or general way: like a regional foodways dish that is present across multiple restaurants or dairy bars, or an association (Marion & popcorn; Bucyrus & bratwurst.)

Some general categories of cultural assets we invite you to consider in our Marion County CHAMP process include:

- Organizations
- Performance Venues
- Galleries & Museums
- Foodways Establishments
- Businesses
- Religious Spaces

Tip: See our Marion Voices CHAMP Packet for more details on how to lead your own Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project!

Ultimately, there is no "right or wrong" or when it comes to identifying cultural heritage assets in our communities. You are the expert. If you think a resource is important to your community, say so ... & we'll include it!

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Historic Contexts:

Marion County African-American Communities

African-American people & communities have made a home in Marion County since at least the mid-19th century. Marion made a name for itself in the 1839 trial of Bill Anderson (sometimes Mitchell), in what became one of the most sensationalized trials of the Fugitive Slave Act; Mr. Anderson, accused of being an escaped slave, was imprisoned under demands from Virginia men claiming to "won" him; the Marion court, however, decided in Bill's favor, which resulted in the slaveholders drawing arms. In the ensuing hubub, Mr. Anderson was escorted along the Underground Railroad to freedom. Freed Black people settled in Marion in the 1870s-1890s; by __, Quinn Chapel -- Marion's earliest historic Black Church -- was established. Marion's West Side -- sometimes derogatorily referred to as "Shantytown" -- became a popular settlement site for families arriving from the South. While Marion City had some abolitionist roots, it also was home to significant anti-Black violence: such as the terrifying Marion 1919 white lynch mobs that ultimately ran 200 Black people from the West Side while smashing windows & raiding homes & businesses. The West Side rebuilt in the aftermath of this trauma through new influxes of Black families from the South -- this time, as part of the longer Great Migration: in search of good-paying industrial jobs & safety from the Jim Crow lynch law & segregation of the South. By the 1950s, Marion's West Side & North Side were once again thriving Black communities, with a Black commercial district with shops, bars, barber salons, restaurants, & more stretched along Senate Street. However, the neighborhood was vulnerable: while self-sufficient, it was cut off from Marion City, jobs, & the local hospitals by railroad tracks, with engines that sat on the line for hours at a time, & no overpass anywhere -- a product of "infrastructural racism." Ostensibly responding to an incident at the Fairgrounds, the City of Marion systematically worked to destroy the West Side's sovereignty & Black business prominence in the 1970s & 1980s through punitive policing & barricades, which dismantled much of the civic infrastructure of the community. Groups like Marion's Jessie Gardner Women's Club, N.A.A.C.P., & Black Heritage Council worked to fight housing segregation & for educational opportunities & equity for Black Marionites across the 20th century. In __, the West Side's Martin Luther King Jr. Park became one of (if not *the*) first MLK Parks in Ohio.

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Community Trends: Marion County African-American Communities

More than in any other session, participants in our Marion County African-American Communities -- who shared a generation -- swapped personal memories, experiences, & stories of life growing up in Marion's historically-Black West Side neighborhood: separated from downtown Marion by railroad track lines. CHAMP session overwhelmingly mourned the loss of accessible downtown recreation, entertainment, commercial, & educational options that characterized their youth; & called out the relocation of schools, essential businesses, & recreational opportunities to the suburb or Highway 95/423 -- a move that made those resources inaccessible to young people of color (& all young people) in the urban core without access to vehicles or transportation. Participants also noted the fading of fraternal organizations & "third spaces" since the 20th century.



Cultural Resources: Marion County African-American Communities

Participants named the following cultural heritage assets as important to Marion County's African-American cultural landscape:

- West Side Black-Owned Businesses:** While no longer extant, Senate Street & Silver Street on Marion's historically-Black West Side were once hubs for Black businesses -- including the Ace-Hi, Elijah Green's Barbeque Shop, the Hub, the Silver Street Inn, & more.
- Shantytown Softball Team:** A defining icon of Marion's African-American community was the semi-professional Shantytown softball team -- named after a derogatory nickname for the West Side -- which played in the 1950s and 1960s.
- Historically-Black Churches of the West Side:** including King's Temple Apostolic Church -- which had a significant Vacant Bible School tradition; the Old Mt. Zion Church location, & Mayes Community Temple on Bennett Street
- West Side Multi-Ethnic Foodways Traditions:** including Italian-owned markets (Mancini's) on Silver Street, Italian-planted orchards & gardens, African-American gardens, & baking traditions including pies & biscuits
- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park:** Participants highlighted MLK Park as a cornerstone of cultural life in the community, & noted with pride that the park was truly a grassroots project, with donation of local land & labor by incarcerated people to develop the park

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Future Community Cultural Assets

Speculation, scheming, & dreaming from our CHAMP session on what Marion County African-American Communities could use; or ways to creatively re-imagine existing cultural heritage & community resources!



Re-Growing a Black Business District on the West Side

Participants overwhelmingly wanted to see a comeback for the West Side as a Black business district. To get there, they want to see intentional outreach & support of Black business owners, & accessible programs to help get vacant lots of vacant commercial properties in the hands of potential entrepreneurs. Participants also want to see the reinvestment in & celebration of "Downtown Marion" extended past the railroad tracks to the West Side.

Re-Greening, Re-Gardening, & Beautification of the West Side

Participants mourned the loss of the Black- and Italian-American-tended gardens, fruit trees, & orchards of the West Side; & saw opportunities, with the many vacant lots in the neighborhood, to both interpret & reclaim the West Side's legacy as a hub for self-sufficient, multi-ethnic foodways. Participants want to see a re-greening, re-gardening, & beautification of the West Side.



West Side Youth, Rec, & Community Center

Participants identified Marion City's young people as the most urgent resource requiring investment; & noted, with concern, that there is nowhere for young people to go to hang out when the weather turns cold. Participants would love to see an indoor youth recreation or community center open on the West Side, that will give young people a place to go, things to do, & will start to revitalize the West Side's lost culture of "third spaces" for community to come together.



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Spotlight on Key Community Cultural Assets

Marion County African-American Communities CHAMP session participants describe these assets as defining features of their community:



The West Side's Black Business District Legacy

Participants honored & celebrated the legacy & impact of the Black-owned business districts on the West Side's Senate & Silver streets as a defining aspect of the history, heritage, & legacy of Marion's West Side, & a key contributor to the sense of safety, security, vibrancy, & sovereignty that participants experienced in the neighborhood in the 1960s and 1970s. While that legacy has largely been dismantled, participants note that bringing back commerce is a critical step in revitalizing the West Side, with one participant noting: "we need to be able to live here to prosper, rather than having to go away & come back to make your mark."

Black Culture on the West Side

Participants honor & cherish memories of the vibrancy of Black culture on the West Side in the 20th century: including local musical groups like the Zots (Zebulon, Orville, Tyrone, & Charles Reese); foodways culture -- including rich traditions of gardening, baking, & hospitality -- & cultures of DIY traditional arts & entrepreneurship, as is expressed in participants' own skills in sewing, alterations work, mushfakewoodcarving, antiques restoration, & more.



MLK Park

Participants lift up the West Side's MLK Park -- the historic home of the West Side Shantytown Softball team, & built through donations from incarcerated people at Marion Correctional Institute -- as a keystone gem of the West Side: worthy of reinvestment, & deserving of the same amenities as larger Marion City Parks properties.



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Discussions & Major Themes: African-American Communities CHAMP Session

Participants in our Marion County African-American Communities CHAMP Session conjured rich memories of a whole other world that once existed on Marion's West Side: a sovereign world of Black-owned businesses, living-wage jobs, neighborhood-based schools, & local entertainment, cultural, & recreational opportunities. In the 1960s, participants remembered & celebrated a West Side with multiple bars, confectioneries, a heating/cooling shop, juke joints, and barbeque shops; & a Marion City that had a roller rink, horseback riding, slot-car racing, a baptism location: things for kids & families to do, without spending a fortune, & without driving out to 95 or 423. Importantly, participants' reflections also focused on how much easier it was, decades before, to make a living in Marion. Participants reflected on the vanished manufacturing industries of Marion -- from Tecumseh to Quaker Oats and its gruesome livelihood ("they would shoot horses in the head to make dog food") to the Fulfillment Company of America. Participants also swapped memories of the different generations of Black Marionite experience that came together on the West Side: it was a place where Marion's long-time Black families welcomed new arrivals from the South; & where Ohio Black culture was consistently joined by Southern Black culture, as well as the culture of Marion's Italian immigrants, who often co-located on the West Side, & also owned businesses (like Mancini's Grocery) on Silver Street. Participants shared that Creston Street, in particular, was a melting pot: one shared that "every ethnic group" lived on Creston; & another reflected that "you didn't live until you were on Creston." Participants also remembered the rich local culture of the West Side -- including a local music group called the Zots; & a rich & diverse culture of African-American foodways: including the wafting smell of pie & biscuits every morning. Participants repeatedly noted the experience of safety & sovereignty for Black people growing up or living on the West Side: "We had no idea racism was a problem until you left Creston ... then, you were in the world."

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Marion Voices' Marion County African-American Communities CHAMP Session participants Ms. Jessie Thompson (born in Georgia) & Mr. John Thompson (born in West Virginia) list cultural heritage resources in their CHAMP packets.

Participants in Marion Voices' African-American Communities of Marion County CHAMP Session -- held on June 16th, 2024 at MLK Park on Marion's Historically-Black West Side -- identify Black-associated cultural heritage assets on a CHAMP map of Marion City.



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Key Takeaways:

Marion County African-American Communities

Here, we summarize key takeaways to each of the eight discussion questions which formed the heart of our Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping session, with participant recommendations for community investment & action.

- Question 1: What important cultural, arts, & heritage resources did we used to have in our community; & what happened to them?** After sharing beloved memories of the West Side as a space of sovereignty, joy, & comparative safety in the 1970s, participants were stark in calling out the intentional structural & policy changes that destroyed the West Side -- in large part, according to one participant, due to intentional starvation of the West Side's resources from the City of Marion, following an incident the Fairgrounds in the 1970s that led to the National Guard being deployed to the West Side. Participants called out the fact that Marion's downtown revitalization has been "selective," & largely hasn't included or extended to the West Side. One participant expressed feeling that "they usually don't let you know there's funding until yesterday was the deadline." Participants also reflected on the way decades of this sort of disinvestment has impacted community pride on the West Side.
- Question 2: What cultural heritage assets in our community are currently threatened; & what would protecting them look like?** Participants describe the challenge of researching and maintaining Black identity & heritage -- which always includes confronting the uncomfortable & traumatic reality of the history of slavery in America. Participants discussed their last names, which were English or Irish, as testament to that history. Participants also discussed the lost foodways landscape of the West Side, which -- thanks to Italian & Black residents -- was once a sea of fruit trees & garden plots: a legacy that's now in danger.
- Question 3: What cultural assets or resources do other communities have that we don't? Why not?** "Proper representation" was participants' resounding answer to this question: "somebody that speaks for us, at any political level: somebody that lives here, & doesn't answer to downtown." Participants expressed that equitable representation in political & public life used to feel more equitable: "you never had to be on the council, walk the streets, or sign the petition." Participants also expressed the strong perception that Marion's judicial system has expressed bias: with young Black people sent to jail, & with other ethnic groups getting to go to rehab.
- Question 5: What cultural assets in our community need to be invested in? What investments are needed? By whom?** Participants had one big answer to this question: young people. Participants want to see youth have a real community center or space, on the West Side, that is safe, open late, caters to their interests, offers enrichment & educational programs, & is designed & staffed by & for the people of the West Side.
- Question 6: What cultural assets are our "best-kept secrets?"** Participants notes that Black people in Marion are "best kept secrets from each other": pointing out the incredible talent of the community, but that people may not know each other or organize together. Participants noted that the stories & memories they shared made them realize how "relational" the community used to be, with a wealth of community memory & knowledge; but "third space" gathering places have been lost: Marion's churches are the only spaces left where people come together.

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Recommendations for Cultural Investment: Marion County African-American Communities

Based on community Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping, discussion, & recommendations at our CHAMP session, Marion Voices makes the following top three recommendations for investment in the cultural heritage landscape of Marion County African-American Communities, with extra recommendations below:

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #1	Revitalize the West Side: Entrepreneurship & Greenery	
	Description: Participants were fiercely proud of the legacy of the West Side, & optimistic that a combination of advocacy & grassroots elbow grease could foment a revitalization. Participants want to see a rebuilding of Black-owned businesses & commerce on the West Side, the extension of Downtown Marion's fervor to the West Side, & a return of gardens.	
Cultural Heritage Recommendation #2	Resources or Policy Change Needed: Funding & investment on the West Side; including grant opportunities, City of Marion or County Commissioner funding; elbow grease!	Potential Changemakers: West Side Neighborhood Coalition; West Side Non-Profit Groups; City of Marion; Downtown Marion, Inc.; Regional Planning; Marion County Land Bank; West Side Residents
	Description: Participants noted the almost all "third spaces" for intergenerational community connection -- Marion's Rec Center & Downtown YMCA, the Medgar Evers Elks Lodge, & community bars, restaurants, & gathering places -- had disappeared from the West Side. Only Black Churches carry that function today. Participants were hungry to connect across the wider African-American community; & expressed a clear need & desire for community & cultural centers, for youth & elders alike, to foster that connection.	
Cultural Heritage Recommendation #3	Resources or Policy Change Needed: Collaborative community planning to identify a location & funding source, & design/designate a facility	Potential Changemakers: West Side Residents; Marion Regional Planning; West Side Black Churches; Elders & Youth
	Description: Participants reflected on the "golden age" of Marion's West Side as a time when ample cultural, recreational, & entertainment opportunities -- from Vacation Bible Schools to horseback riding to slot car racing to musical performance -- was available right in the neighborhood. Re-localizing culture, recreation, & entertainment opportunities across Marion's neighborhood, & on the West Side, will re-build sense of place & sense of pride.	
Cultural Heritage Recommendation #4	Resources or Policy Change Needed: Entrepreneurial & arts/culture-landscape collaborative planning & investment to identify needs & opportunities for new resources	Potential Changemakers: West Side Residents; Arts/Culture Non-Profits (incl. Marion Voices); West Side Non-Profits; Peace & Freedom, Marion Matters
	Description: Participants reflected on the "golden age" of Marion's West Side as a time when ample cultural, recreational, & entertainment opportunities -- from Vacation Bible Schools to horseback riding to slot car racing to musical performance -- was available right in the neighborhood. Re-localizing culture, recreation, & entertainment opportunities across Marion's neighborhood, & on the West Side, will re-build sense of place & sense of pride.	

Additional Recommendations: African-American Communities

- Recommendation #4 -- Youth Cultural // Recreation Center:** A dedicated, stand-alone youth cultural or recreation or community center -- something "open late" -- was a key desire of participants in this African-American CHAMP session
- Recommendation #5 -- Offer Intergenerational Workshops // Classes in Skilled Trades & Traditional Arts, to Grow Livelihoods:** Participants practiced career-supporting skills including sewing, fashion design, antiques restoration, & woodcarving. Intergenerational classes could foster community & cultural memory, & build livelihoods: helping new generations launch cultural heritage businesses.
- Recommendation #6 -- Create Place-Based Entrepreneurial Incubation Programs:** Invest in diversifying commerce not just Downtown, but in Marion's diverse neighborhoods -- like the West Side -- through neighborhood-based community commercial design charettes & targeted neighborhood entrepreneurship cohorts

the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP)



Marion County CHAMP Report: African-American Communities

For more information or to get involved: marionvoices.org/CHAMP

This report details community feedback, findings, & discussions from our June 16th, 2024 Marion County African-American Communities CHAMP Session, held at MLK Park. Report findings are reflective of participants; but provide a starting place for future investments in arts, culture, & community in each community!

Thank you to all who participated in the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping process!



Marion County African-American Communities CHAMP session participants Ms. Jessie Thompson, Mr. David (Dale) King, & Ms. Maxine Thomas map childhood memories & resources onto a map of Marion City.

Participants gathered at a picnic table at Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park on the West Side of Marion for Marion Voices' Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project session focused on Marion's African-American Communities, held on June 16th, 2024.



Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History presents ...



Marion County CHAMP Map: African-American Communities



For more information or to get involved: marionvoices.org/CHAMP

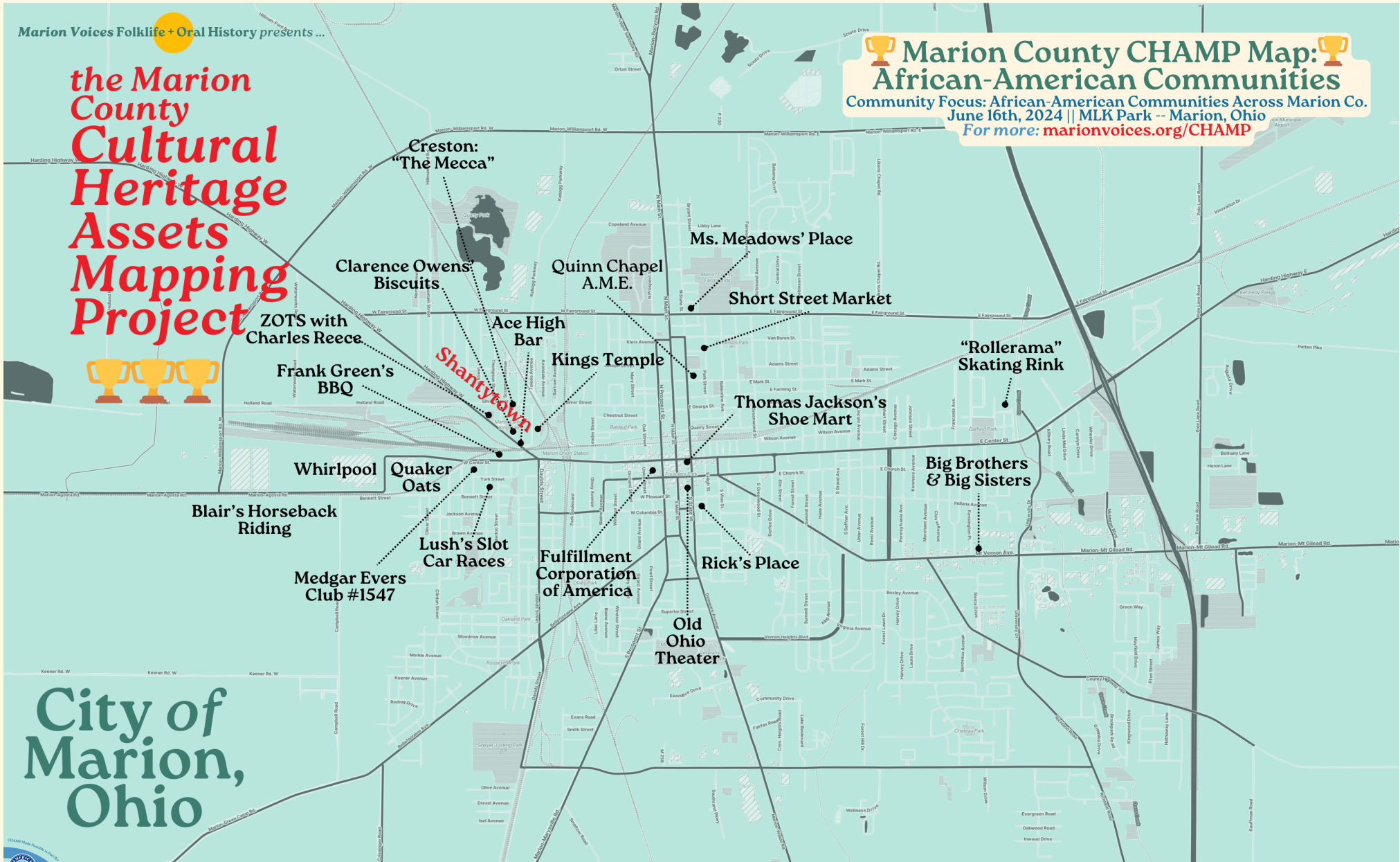
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Marion County CHAMP Map: African-American Communities

Community Focus: African-American Communities Across Marion Co.
June 16th, 2024 || MLK Park -- Marion, Ohio
For more: marionvoices.org/CHAMP



About Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History:

North-Central Ohio's Folklife, Cultural Arts, & Heritage Non-Profit
Champions of Arts, Culture, & Heritage-Based Economic Development for North-Central Ohio!

Founded in 2017, Marion Voices amplifies the diverse cultural heritages & traditional arts forms of Marion County & North-Central Ohio to build more just, more abundant futures for everyone: connecting communities & building solidarities across difference, growing arts-based economies, & nourishing pride-in-place in North-Central Ohio. Our core programs include exhibits, festivals, historic preservation, & advocacy & training for regional artists through paid performance opportunities, a folk arts apprenticeship program, & our popular Marion Voices in the Schools K-12 arts residency program: bringing community cultural artists across genres into our local schools. Our Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP) takes us back to our roots: partnering directly with communities across Marion County to survey our cultural arts & heritage resources, share stories, & collectively imagine more just, more abundant futures for all. In late Summer/Fall 2024, we're excited to take this work regional with the launch of our North-Central Ohio CHAMP process & a new folklife survey in twelve neighboring North-Central Ohio counties. Join us!!!

