

Charlton Research Award Report
Oyotunji Landscape Narratives: Stories of Place, Space and Spirit
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I am proud to have been the recipient of the inaugural Charlton Oral History Research Award and to have provided the opportunity for eleven individuals to record their personal experiences of connection to Oyotunji African Village as a sacred site. The documented stories range from those of the early founders who established the site in 1970, as an intentional community based on a nationalist ideology and an African worldview, to those second generation members who embrace an eco-spiritual philosophy and reverence for the land. This collection of narratives supports my original premise that the constructed environment, coupled with the elements of nature, functions as a sacred text, even as scripture, for the believing community.

The completion of the interviews is Phase II of a larger project. Phase I consisted of an extensive review of relevant literature in cultural landscape theory and practice, as a Summer 2011 Research Fellow in Garden and Landscape Studies at The Dumbarton Oaks Research Library in Washington, DC.

The third and final phase of the project will include a paper proposal for presentation at the 2013 Oral History Association annual meeting, a journal article submitted for publication, and a book proposal. The Oyotunji Landscape Narratives Project also makes a significant contribution to the Religion and Culture component of the Baylor University Oral History Collection. This interdisciplinary project will make a contribution to several areas of study, including oral history, spirituality and landscape architecture, visual anthropology, religious studies, and African American religions. It points to the importance of recognizing the value of personal narrative, material culture, and oral history in the study of the lived religious experience.

The residents of Oyotunji Village expressed their appreciation for my work, and I in turn, express my appreciation to Baylor University Institute for Oral History for making it possible.