



September 1, 2022

Mr. Tokey Boswell  
Associate Regional Director  
Facilities, Planning, and Infrastructure  
National Park Service  
601 Riverfront Drive  
Omaha, NE 68102

*Submitted via email to Tokey\_Boswell@nps.gov*

Re: Springfield 1908 Race Riot Site

Dear Tokey:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and perspectives on the Springfield 1908 Race Riot site in Springfield, Illinois. We appreciate the extensive work of the National Park Service (NPS) to evaluate this site as part of the congressionally-authorized special resource study, including outreach efforts of the public comment period. The National Trust for Historic Preservation supports the designation of this site as a National Monument and encourages President Biden to use his authority under the Antiquities Act to protect the Springfield site to acknowledge its historic and national significance as a site of racial violence and tell the story of the efforts of Black leadership to overcome that terrible tragedy.

### **Interests of the National Trust for Historic Preservation**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately-funded charitable, educational, and nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1949 to “facilitate public participation in historic preservation” and to further the purposes of federal historic preservation laws.<sup>1</sup> The intent of Congress was for the National Trust “to mobilize and coordinate public interest, participation, and resources in the preservation and interpretation of sites and buildings.” With headquarters in Washington, D.C., 28 historic sites, more than one million members and supporters, and a national network of partners in states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Trust works to save America’s historic places and advocates for historic preservation as a fundamental value in programs and policies at all levels of government.

The National Trust has long supported the permanent preservation and protection of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot site, and we have a strong interest in seeing the full history of this significant place preserved. We appreciate the leadership of Representative Rodney Davis and Senator Tammy Duckworth on their bicameral legislation that supports the designation of the Springfield site as a National Monument, and we were pleased to submit comments to congressional committees in support of efforts to preserve this historic place.

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<sup>1</sup> 54 U.S.C. § § 320101, 312102

Per the SRS format for the public comment period, our feedback is included below in response to the provided questions.

**What is your vision for preserving the 1908 Springfield Race Riot archeological site and how would you like to see the site managed? What types of activities and experiences would you want to see as part of the site into the future?**

The National Trust's vision for the preservation of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot site principally involves the permanent protection and preservation of these historic resources by ensuring their inclusion in the National Park System. This approach would provide both a memorial to honor the victims of the riots and an opportunity to interpret this significant place for the benefit of future generations.

The multi-faceted history associated with the Springfield site under consideration by the SRS process clearly demonstrates the national significance of this site. The NPS has an opportunity to explore and share that history with a combination of several themes including the struggle against racial violence and injustice, as well as broader discussion of the civil rights movement and the inspiring stories of leadership like that of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the NAACP.

We encourage the NPS to provide a comprehensive visitor experience at the 1908 Springfield Race Riot site that includes on-site interpretation, public access, educational opportunities, and a community-led memorial to riot victims, their descendants, and the community. More specifically, we support the inclusion of the people-centric element of this history that acknowledges the struggles and achievements of Black leadership, women, and community leaders in addressing the racial violence at this site and others, which is an integral component to telling the full history of the Springfield site.

The National Trust strongly supports continued collaboration and partnership with the NAACP and key stakeholders to include closely related initiatives involving local historic resources, lynching sites, and museum collections to enhance a comprehensive approach to the establishment of a new NPS site.

**Do you have any ideas or concerns that the National Park Service should be aware of and/or address in the study process? What objects, buildings, remaining features, values and stories do you believe are most important at this site (or related to the riot but not at this site) and why?**

The area near Madison Street and the 10th Street Rail Corridor in Springfield, Illinois includes structural remains of black-owned homes burned during the 1908 race riots. Over the course of two days during these riots, the community experienced the shooting deaths and lynching of African Americans, as well as significant destruction of property. In addition to interpreting these historical events, the designation of a NPS site provides an opportunity to highlight related events that coincide with other nationally significant factors to a broader story of the civil rights movement.

The Springfield riots were also a catalyst for civil rights activists to launch meetings that led to the founding of the NAACP and directly connect to additional inspiring, people-centric stories of courageous activism to fight the scourge of lynching, racial injustice, and racial violence. As you are aware, a National Park Service reconnaissance survey discussed the national significance of the Springfield race riot site and noted that the National Register for Historic Places-eligible site "offers a unique opportunity to interpret the founding of the (NAACP) as well as expand the narrative about racial violence at the turn of the 20th century." With this report referencing the rare survival of burned structural remains from race riots during this time period and only a small number of

sites associated with racial terror listed on the National Register, it is even more important to secure permanent protection for this historic place.

**Do you support or oppose a potential national park unit designation? Do you have any other ideas or comments you would like to share with us?**

As noted above, the National Trust strongly endorses an approach that ensures the permanent preservation and protection of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot site, and we would support the designation of this site as a National Monument. The rich history of this nationally significant site fills a critical gap in the stories told throughout the National Park System, and designation of the Springfield site as a National Monument would help interpret this story for future generations while providing a resource for learning, healing, and honoring race riot victims, their descendants, and the community at an included memorial.

We appreciate your leadership and commitment to these important issues as you continue your efforts on the special resource study process. We look forward to working with the National Park Service and other stakeholders to establish this National Monument.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pam Bowman". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Pam" and "Bowman" being capitalized and prominent.

Pam Bowman  
Senior Director of Public Lands Policy  
National Trust for Historic Preservation