In 1942 Henry Ward, a well respected Democratic legislator from Paducah, sponsored a bill in the Kentucky Legislature that segregated the urban park systems in six of Kentucky’s largest cities. Although many extreme and deplorable forms of segregation existed across the South well before 1942, this law infused a progressive element in Kentucky’s urban environments: it became the first State law that allowed African-Americans to control their communities’ leisure and recreational opportunities. The law mandated that separately funded African-American park boards would administer the African-American park systems in each of the six cities.

However, this law did not mark the beginning of African-American parks in Kentucky. Twenty years after the landmark separate-but-equal ruling of Plessy vs. Ferguson and during World War I, Lexington established Douglass Park in 1916. After this opening celebration, attended by over five-thousand people, Fredrick Douglass Park would become a central meeting place for African-American families across the Bluegrass. Although Lexington had the most developed African-American park system in the State until integration, other cities had similar parks, such as Stewart Nelson Park in Paducah and Chickasaw Park in Louisville. To maintain the policy of separate-but-equal public facilities, the State opened Cherokee State Resort on Kentucky Lake in 1948 and publicized the park as the, “The South’s finest vacation park for Negroes.” Because the majority of historical research either disregards African-American public history or accentuates the negative aspects of segregation, we have few documents today that detail how African-American communities used these parks and how these activities empowered their daily lives.

The Daily Aesthetic is a video documentary that attempts to amend the lack of an African-American public historical record. This documentary project has three goals. This documentary will first preserve those oral histories, photographs, and any archival material that explore how these spaces enriched the daily culture of African-American lives throughout Kentucky. With contributions from prominent scholars and artists, this project will then ground the narrative of these parks in a broader African-American experience. Finally, with the statewide broadcast of this documentary through Kentucky Educational Television, this project will not only unite and appeal to Kentucky’s African-American communities, but will educate the greater public on the significance of public history.