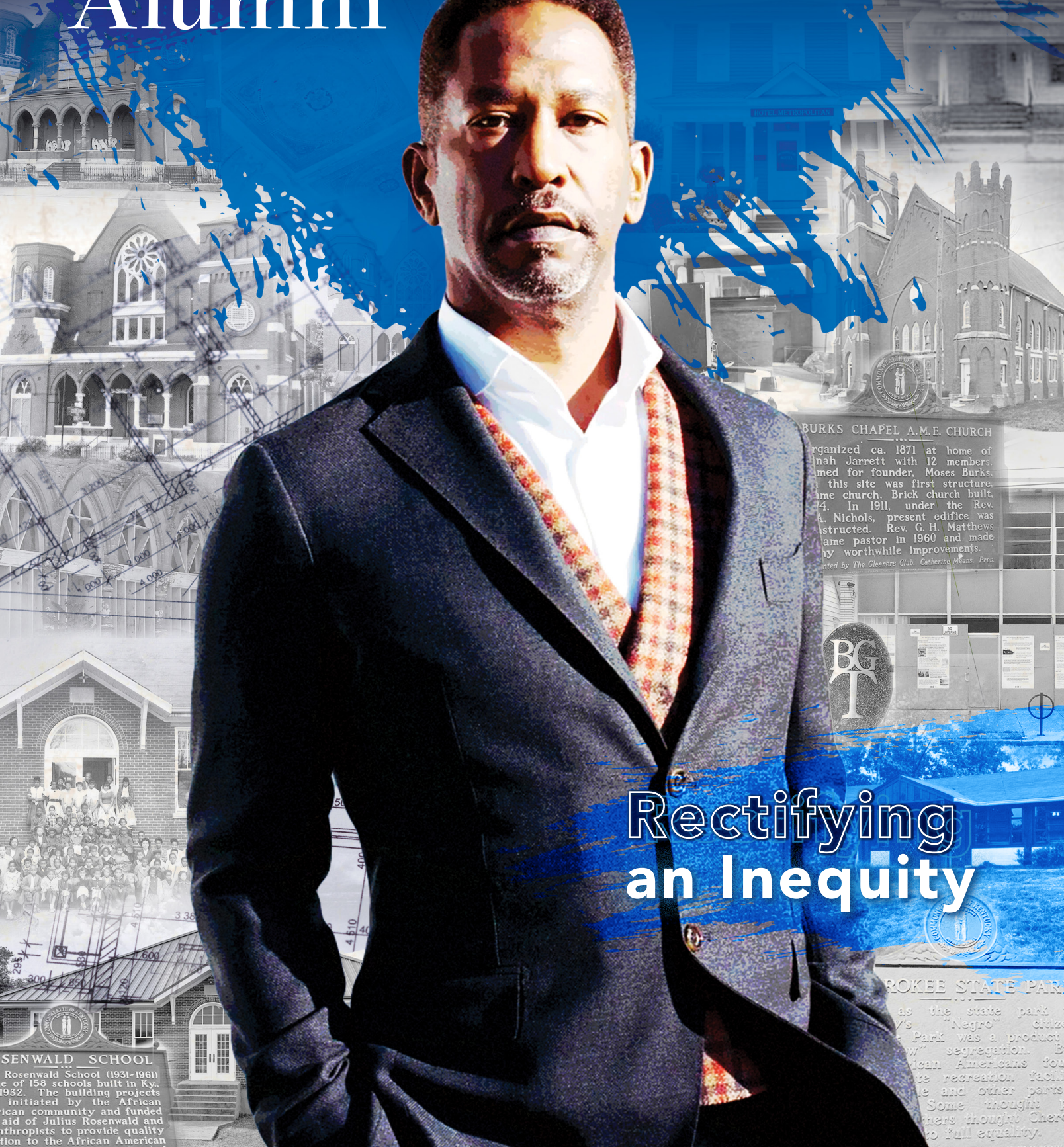
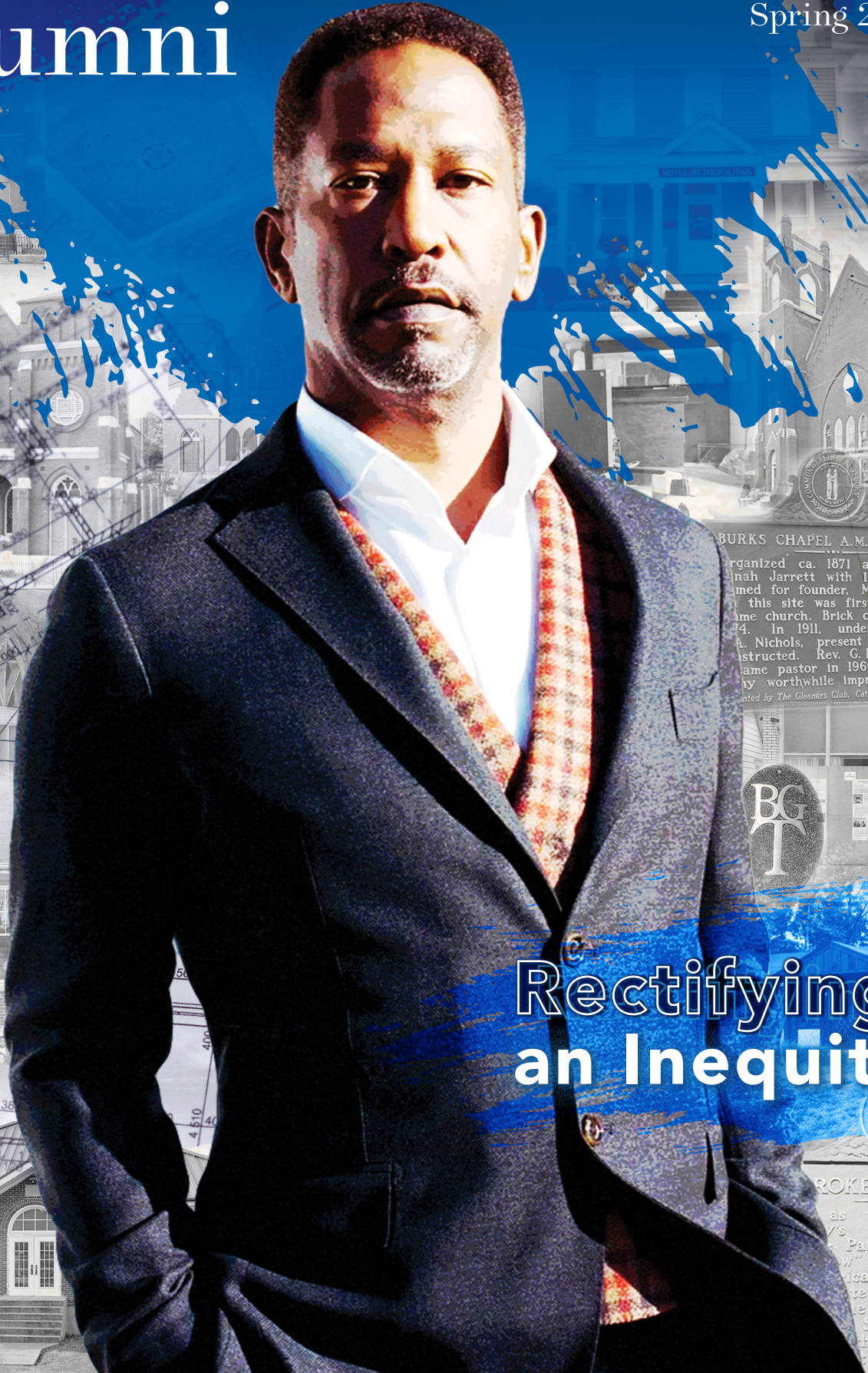


University of Kentucky Alumni Association

KENTUCKY

Alumni

Spring 2023



BURKS CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH

organized ca. 1871 at home of
annah Jarrett with 12 members.
named for founder, Moses Burks.
this site was first structure.
ame church. Brick church built
14. In 1911, under the Rev.
A. Nichols, present edifice was
constructed. Rev. G. H. Matthews
ame pastor in 1960 and made
by worthwhile improvements.
anted by The Cleaners Club. Catherine Means, Pres.



Rectifying an Inequity

ROSENWALD SCHOOL

Rosenwald School (1931-1961)
e of 158 schools built in Ky.
1932. The building projects
initiated by the African
ican community and funded
aid of Julius Rosenwald and
thropists to provide quality
tion to the African American

ROCKEE STATE PARK

as the state park
ys "Negro" cruze
Park was a product
w" segregation. B
ican Americans fou
ate recreation facilie
le and other parts
Some thought
thers thought Oer
to full equality.



Brent Leggs spoke with Dion Harris (left), Summit Metro Parks landscape architect, at the groundbreaking of the Sojourner Truth Memorial Plaza in Akron, Ohio, in August 2022. Harris designed the plaza which is currently under construction.



Rectifying an Inequity

With his love of history and an MBA,
Brent Leggs can 'tell the full story'

By Sally Scherer

UK alumnus Brent Leggs' parents were educated at a Rosenwald School. Built between 1912-1932, nearly 5,000 Rosenwald Schools provided education to Black children at a time in this country when it wasn't otherwise readily available.

Funded by Julius Rosenwald, president of retailer Sears, Roebuck & Co., and devised by Booker T. Washington, educator, author and president of the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), the schools educated more than 500,000 African American students.

When the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling declared segregated schools unconstitutional, Rosenwald Schools became obsolete and many were abandoned or demolished.

Leggs earned a BBA in 1997 and an MBA in 2000 from the Gatton College of Business and Economics. Despite his business education, he was pretty sure corporate America was not a good fit for him.

He was doing some "soul searching" when he decided to learn more about a furniture making program in UK's School of Architecture. A random conversation with Dennis Domer, the chair of the graduate program in historic preservation, led Leggs to attend that gradu-

ate program and to conduct a statewide survey of the Rosenwald Schools, a project the state was undertaking.

"He made a very compelling case," said Leggs of Paducah, Kentucky. "I could combine my interest in real estate with history and preservation."

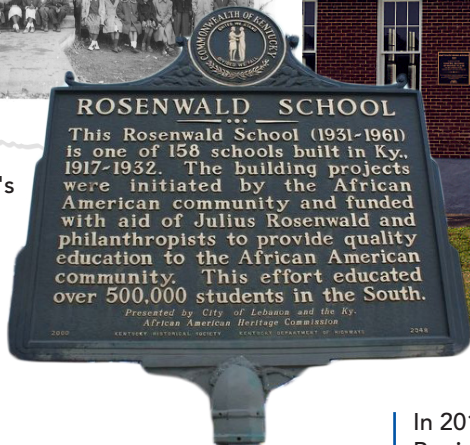
On a whim and a chance, Leggs said yes, he remembered. He was to locate and document each of the 158 Rosenwald Schools in 64 counties across Kentucky. Ultimately, all the buildings eligible were to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The 2003 assignment gave Leggs a chance to meet grassroots preservationists and to blend his training in business — he had taken courses in real estate finance and was interested in development — with an interest he was just discovering in historic preservation. Walking through some of the Rosenwald Schools was life changing.

"Standing in a Rosenwald school and being able to touch it, to smell its decay, to see the sunlight come in through the broken windowpanes, to see the physical evidence of the Black experience in Kentucky. It was spiritual," he said.



Rosenwald's May's Lick Elementary. October 1957.



In 2018, the May's Lick Rosenwald School was listed on the National Register for Historic Places. The school is distinctive as it is brick and has a basement, an unusual feature for a Rosenwald School.

For the next year and a half, he worked on his research project. To better understand the relationship between Rosenwald and Washington, Leggs read Washington's autobiography, "Up From Slavery." The book tells the story of Washington's rise from being enslaved on a Virginia tobacco farm to becoming the president of the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama.

"I understood the idea in Booker T. Washington's manifesto in physical form and direct connection to my family. That is powerful," he said.

The Rosenwald research sparked an interest in Leggs that was just the beginning of what has turned out to be an impactful and important career. Since 2005, Leggs has worked at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Today he is the executive director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund and senior vice president of the National Trust.

"He was in the right place at the right time with the right institution," said Dan Vivian, associate professor in the UK College of Design and director of undergraduate certificate in historic preservation, of Leggs' time at UK. "Rosenwald Schools matter because they tell the history of integration. Places like this matter. Otherwise, the history goes way. And if it wasn't for Brent, none of this type of work at the National Trust would be happening."

Leggs started his career at the National Trust by helping launch the Northeast African American Historic Places Outreach Program that focused on saving significant landmarks in African American history. Some of those saved include the Hinchliffe Stadium in Patterson, New Jersey, one of the last remaining Negro Leagues stadiums in the U.S.; the Irvington, New York, home of millionaire entrepreneur Madam C.J. Walker; and legendary boxer Joe Frazier's Philadelphia training gym.

Today, he oversees the work of the Action Fund — with its motto "Tell the Full Story" — which has raised more than \$80 million and supported more than 200 preservation projects nationally since it began. And it has a \$14 million endowment. Grants are distributed annually for the work that has included multi-year preservation campaigns for projects such as the St. James AME church in Mayfield, Kentucky, the childhood home of American musical icon Nina Simone in Tryon, North Carolina, and the home of saxophonist, band leader and composer John Coltrane and his wife Alice in Dix Hills, New York.

The Fund was created after the 2017 incident in Charlottesville, Virginia, when white supremacists protested the removal of a state of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. The protest resulted in the murder of counter protester Heather Heyer.

2022-2023
The Fund
celebrates its
5th
anniversary

More than
\$80
million
raised since
its launch

\$4
million
in grants to
35 historic
Black churches
across the United
States

Photo by Manoush Zomorodi



Brent Leggs at the A.G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham, Alabama. The motel stood at the center of several significant chapters of the Civil Rights movement.

Sites in Kentucky that have received funding from the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund

2023:

- 1 **Burks Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Paducah** was organized in 1871 and has a long history of opening its doors to all in need, including creating the area's first Black school in the late 1800s. The \$200,000 grant is part of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund's Preserving Black Churches program and will help make repairs to the failing and fragile church steeples and towers, making it a safer place.

2022:

- 2 **Louisville's Quinn Chapel AME Church** has a long history of civil rights involvement dating from its congregation's establishment in 1838, when it was known as the "Abolitionist Church." Quinn Chapel was built in 1884. A \$100,000 grant was awarded to help with ongoing efforts to preserve the historic church, particularly restoring the building's electricity.

- 3 **St. James AME Church, Mayfield** was founded in 1868. The brick church building was devastated by the fall 2021 tornado. Through the Action Fund, the church was awarded a \$100,000 emergency grant and is the first recipient of the Preserving Black Churches Project's special emergency fund.

2021:

- 4 **Cherokee State Resort Historic Park, Hardin** was the first segregated state park and recreational site for Black Americans in the South. It was established in 1951 and operated until 1964. It was a complement to the then-whites-only Kentucky Lake State Park, which was nearby. Abandoned until 2002, today the area is part of Kenlake State Resort Park. A grant of \$50,000 will be used for interpretative signage and programming to tell its story.

- 5 **The Palmer Pharmacy Building, Lexington** once held one of the city's first Black-owned pharmacies. Dr. Zirl A. Palmer built Palmer's Pharmacy, Luncheonette and Doctor's Office in 1961. He was the first Black to serve on the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees. His term was 1972-1979. Recently, the building that was once slated for demolition, was given new life under an agreement with the city for the United Way of the Bluegrass to open a community resource center there.

- 6 **Hotel Metropolitan Purple Room, Paducah.** The hotel opened in 1909, serving Black travelers when lodging was segregated. It hosted notables such as Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington and Thurgood Marshall. The Purple Room, a freestanding building behind the hotel, was an after-hours gathering space for musicians. A \$50,000 grant will allow for restoration so it can be used as a gathering space once more.

2020:

May's Lick Rosenwald School, Maysville. Built in 1921 and an early example of its type, May's Lick Rosenwald School is one of the few remaining Rosenwald schools in Kentucky and the only one of its type in Northern Kentucky. The school needs rehabilitation and the town received a \$50,000 grant to complete the rehabilitation of the school project. May's Lick Rosenwald School is distinctive because it has a basement.



After Charlottesville, the debate over the removal of Confederate statues in many American cities led to questions about what other sites and histories deserve to be preserved. And, as a 2020 article in the *New Yorker* about Leggs said, the debate reinforced what Leggs had believed for decades that preservation is political and that the kinds of places and structures that are protected are less an indication of what we value from the past than a matter of what we venerate today.

When the Action Fund was started in 2017, of the nearly 100,000 places in the National Register of Historic Places about two percent spoke to Black accomplishments.

"This is my dream manifested," said Leggs recently of the Action Fund of which he is the founding visionary. "We view the Action Fund as a social movement. It's a revolution. I'm so proud of this work."

Since its inception, The Fund has received more than 4,300 funding proposals with requests for \$500 million.

The Action Fund isn't part of the federal government. It receives money from private donations and investors.

The preservation funding has played a major role in helping save several Kentucky African American sites, said Tressa Brown, historic preservation coordinator at the Kentucky Heritage Council. And because Leggs is a Kentuckian, many state projects that might otherwise have not been funded have received grants.

"I feel like we have a better shot at receiving grant money because he's there. He knows our history.

"And the grants we've received have helped generate interest in the preservation projects. It's not a one and done. It's like breathing new life into something. After the grant is received what we're seeing is that people are taking an interest in the project and that spaces are being used," said Brown who oversees the Kentucky African American Heritage Commission.

Vivian emphasized the importance of that, saying that making properties viable and impactful on the communities where they are located is paramount. It's one thing to preserve a building or historic site. It's another to keep it active, give it a purpose, allow it to help a community by serving community members. Vivian credits Leggs' education in business for understanding the importance of that.

In a 2020 Ted Radio Talk on NPR, Leggs said recognizing and preserving Black historical sites shows that Black Americans are appreciated and that the African American community is recognized for the 400+ years contribution it has made to this country.

"It means that our nation is making new investments to address years of disinvestment and inequity and to understand that the Black experience is an American experience," he said.

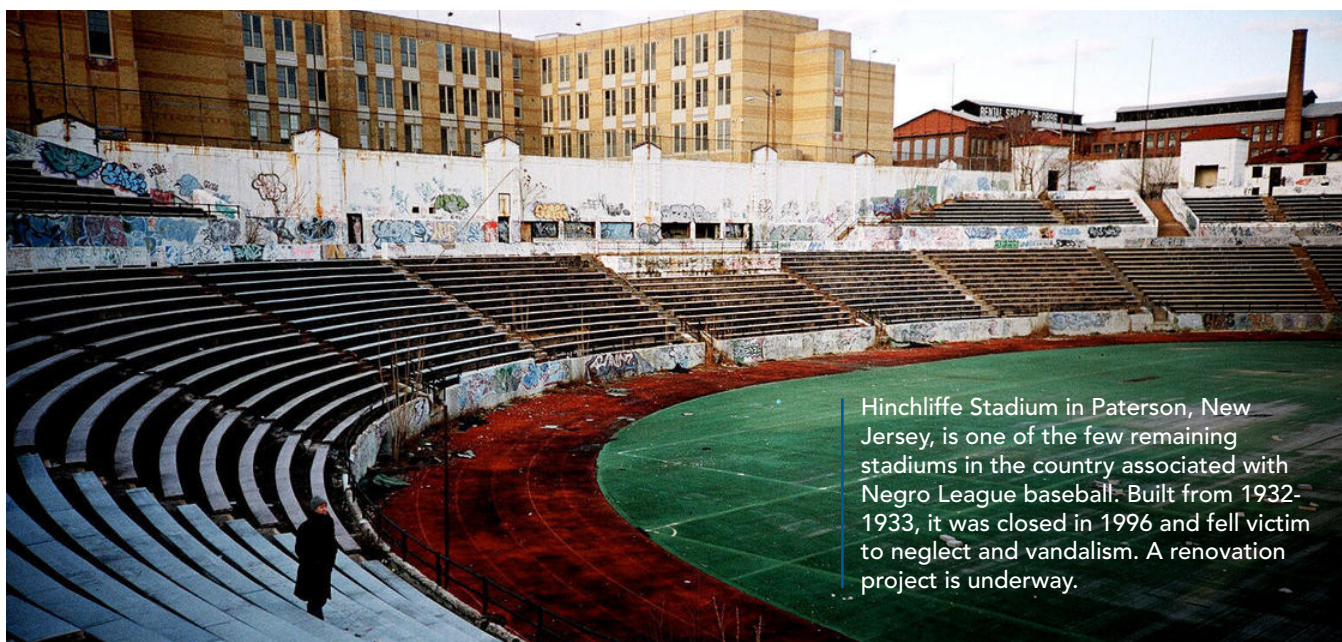
Part of the work of the Action Fund is to help grow resources for future preservation for places that are significant for women, Latinx, LGBTQ+ and others.

"It's important that Americans know this history because all Americans should be able to see themselves in our shared history."

Jonathan Coleman, executive director of Lexington's Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation and a 2014 UK graduate with a Ph.D. in history, said Leggs represents the future of preservation.

"The power of preservation is that it can do so much more than simply save buildings. It can impact inequalities and climate change and it can have community impact and solve social ills.

"It used to be that saving a historic home and turning it into a museum was the model of preservation. Now it's so much more and Brent's work represents the power of preservation and where it is headed." ■



Hinchliffe Stadium in Paterson, New Jersey, is one of the few remaining stadiums in the country associated with Negro League baseball. Built from 1932-1933, it was closed in 1996 and fell victim to neglect and vandalism. A renovation project is underway.

Photo by Daniel Lugo