

National Register of Historic Places

Places Associated with Cultural, Ethnic, or Identity Communities

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation’s official list of buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts (referred to as “properties” or “places”) significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. It is challenging to accurately characterize, by count or percentage, National Register-listed places by association with cultural, ethnic, or identity groups because the ways in which this information has been collected by, and provided to, the National Register has changed and evolved over the decades. National Register staff estimate that as of 2022, approximately 10% of places listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register have been identified as significant to cultural, ethnic, or identity communities.

How does the National Register record cultural, ethnic, and identity associations?

Cultural, ethnic, and identity associations are recorded on the National Register form under “Area of Significance.” Suggested areas of significance categories and subcategories are found in the *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*. The most current version of the list is available on the National Register’s website. National Register staff do not select the area(s) of significance for a place; that information is determined by the nomination preparer and nominating authority. When a nomination is received by the National Register, area(s) of significance listed on the nomination form are entered by National Register staff into the National Register Information System (NRIS) work flow application. The nomination is then reviewed by National Register staff and in doing so, they may spot a need for additional or different area(s) of significance and return the nomination to the nominating authority for suggested revision.



James Baldwin Residence (NY), listed 2019.

How have the area of significance categories changed over the years?

The areas of significance categories have evolved, and continue to evolve, with time and many were not in place until more recent decades. For example, Jackson Hall, the only original extant building on the campus of Jackson State University, a historical Black university in Jackson, Mississippi, was listed in the National Register in 1977 for significance in education and social/humanitarian movements. “Ethnic heritage” was not then a suggested area of significance and so this information was neither captured on the form nor entered into NRIS; as a result, Jackson Hall would not appear in a NRIS search for places associated with Black heritage.

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How are significant people identified?

Properties may be significant for their association with individuals, *e.g.*, a notable architect, labor organizer, or civil rights leader. However, the cultural, ethnic, or other identify association of an individual is not always identified by the area(s) of significance and so would not be captured in NRIS. For example, the James Baldwin Residence in New York was listed in the National Register in 2019 for its association with the prominent African American novelist, playwright, essayist, poet, and activist. The nomination form notes areas of significance of “Literature” and “Social History: LGBT, Civil Rights” but not “Ethnic Heritage: Black” and so the James Baldwin Residence would not appear in an NRIS search for places associated with Black heritage.

How complete is the National Register’s data?

Although the areas of significance for identifying cultural, ethnic, and identity associations on the National Register nomination form have grown tremendously with the passage of time, not all nomination proponents apply them consistently. National Register nominations are typically submitted by State Historic Preservation Officers, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, and Federal Preservation Officers, and the information entered into NRIS reflects the categories selected by those nominating authorities. For example, a nomination proponent might identify only “ethnic heritage,” while another might further specify “ethnic heritage: Asian;” however, a much smaller number of authors will specify the particular community or group, *e.g.*, Chinese, Filipino, or Japanese.

How is the National Register Program addressing diversity among listings?

To better ensure National Register listings include places of significance to all Americans, the National Register is actively working on the following initiatives.

- ✓ Updated guidance on evaluating significance and integrity to better support proponents and partners in developing nominations.
- ✓ Analysis of listed properties to identify and capture possible additional areas of significance to identify nominations in need of updating to reflect the fuller story of those places.

