



## YOUR COMMUNITY. YOUR STORY. YOUR PARK.

### A BIG WELCOME

On October 17, 2022, President Joseph Biden signed the Blackwell School National Historic Site Act authorizing the establishment of Blackwell School National Historic Site in Marfa, Texas, and directing the Secretary of the Interior to acquire the property and establish a new unit of the national park system. The legislation directed the National Park Service to preserve, protect, and interpret the Blackwell School, including its role as an academic and cultural cornerstone in Marfa, Texas, and its function within a segregated system of education in Texas and the United States from the period of 1885 through 1965.

The National Park Service is welcoming the new park by beginning the process of preparing a foundation document to guide future planning and management of Blackwell School National Historic Site.

### WHAT IS A FOUNDATION DOCUMENT?

A foundation document identifies a national park unit's core purpose and significance, its most important resources and values, and the interpretive themes that tell its unique American story. All persons with an interest in or connection to the Blackwell School are invited to participate in this effort.

### WHY ARE FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS IMPORTANT?

The preparation of a foundation document is the first step in planning for any new park. The intention of a foundation document is not to provide specific management actions or development planning; rather, the foundation document guides future decision making by ensuring all efforts stem from a unified understanding of what is most important about the park.

*Above: Photos by Sara M. Vasquez, courtesy of Blackwell School Alliance*

### JOIN US

**At a public meeting** at the Marfa Visitor Center/ USO Building, 302 S. Highland Ave., Marfa, Texas 79843

#### Meeting 1

Tuesday, June 25, 2024  
5:30–7:30 pm CT

#### Meeting 2

Wednesday, June 26, 2024  
11:00 am–1:00 pm CT

Learn more about this project and provide your input at:

[https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BLSC\\_FD](https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BLSC_FD)



# WE WANT YOUR INPUT!

As the foundation document process begins, we encourage public input about the new park, including what is most important about the Blackwell School, potential issues that could threaten park resources, and opportunities for preservation, commemoration, or interpretation.

Please consider providing your thoughts and ideas on the new park by July 11, 2024, so they can inform the foundation document's development.



## WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What are the core resources at Blackwell School National Historic Site that should be protected and shared with visitors?
2. What should people know about the history of Blackwell School National Historic Site? What are its most important stories?
3. What are the biggest challenges facing Blackwell School National Historic Site?
4. What are the biggest opportunities for Blackwell National Historic Site when considering its new status as a unit of the national park system?

## HOW TO COMMENT

Your written feedback can be submitted in two ways during the open comment period from May 28 to July 12, 2024.

### Online (preferred method)

Submit your comments at:

[https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BLSC\\_FD](https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BLSC_FD)

Click the "Open for Comment" tab on the left menu.

### By mail

Mail your comments to:

National Park Service  
Denver Service Center  
Attn: Blackwell School Foundation /  
Charles Lawson  
12795 West Alameda Pkwy  
Denver, CO 80228

### Join us at a public meeting

If you wish to share your thoughts with the National Park Service team in person, we will be holding two public meetings where we will provide information about the foundation document process, gather feedback, and answer your questions.

Both meetings will be at the Marfa Visitor Center in the Historic USO Building at 302 S. Highland Ave., Marfa, Texas 79843. The meeting formats will be identical; please consider joining us at the one most convenient to you.

**Meeting 1:** Tuesday, June 25, 2024—5:30 pm to 7:30 pm (CT)

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE HISTORY OF BLACKWELL SCHOOL

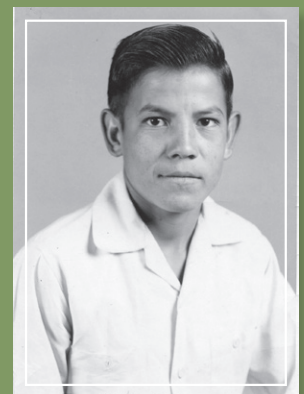
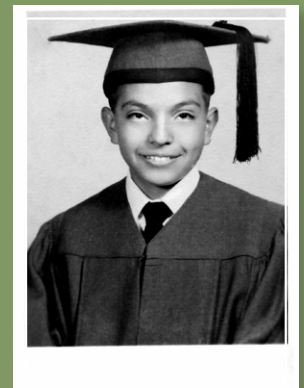
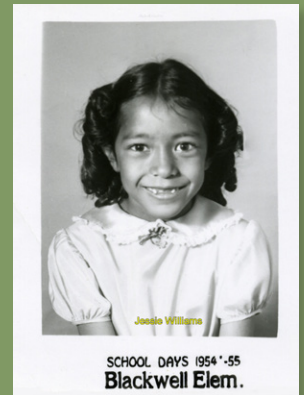
Blackwell School is the sole surviving building directly associated with the segregated education of students of Mexican descent in Marfa, Texas. The school stands as a tangible reminder of the racist “separate but equal” doctrine that dominated social and educational institutions during the first half of the 20th century and as a representation of the persistence of Mexican and Mexican American history, culture, identity, and resistance within Anglo-dominated systems.



The 1876 Texas state constitution mandated racial segregation in all levels of education and required separate schools for Black and White students; Mexican Americans were legally considered White, but de facto segregation between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans and blatantly racist policies were common across the Southwest and persisted into the mid-1960s.

Marfa, Texas—founded in 1883 as a freight headquarters and railroad water stop in far west Texas—opened its first public school in 1885. As the community’s population grew, along with regional anti-Mexican sentiment, the Marfa school district constructed a new White school in 1892. School officials claimed students of Mexican ancestry had English language deficiencies that necessitated separate, specialized instruction, so Mexican American pupils continued to attend classes in the 1885 building. In 1909, the local school district constructed a schoolhouse south of Marfa’s downtown dedicated to the education of Mexican American students. The new school, called the Ward School or Mexican School, continued to justify de facto segregation based on perceived English language deficiencies. In 1947, the school was renamed the Blackwell School to honor long-time teacher and principal Jesse Blackwell.

“Mexican schools,” which operated in over 120 school districts in 59 counties across Texas, reinforced the economic and social subjugation of Hispanics and created additional barriers for students looking to continue past primary school within the public education system. Curricula at these schools focused on



*Above: Photos courtesy of Blackwell School Alliance*





*Photo courtesy of Blackwell School Alliance*

foundational literacy and basic workforce skills and ultimately aimed to assimilate students into Anglo-dominant American culture and promote the English language through a “no Spanish in the classroom” rule. However, in the face of discrimination, Mexican Schools also provided space for the Hispanic community to gather and celebrate its culture and heritage.

The Marfa Independent School District (ISD) closed Blackwell School in 1965 after constructing a new elementary school and integrating the community's elementary, junior high, and high schools in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. With the exception of the 1909 Blackwell School and the 1927 Band Hall, which were retained for use as a vocational school and district storage, many of the campus buildings were subsequently demolished.

On learning that Marfa ISD was considering demolishing the remaining buildings in 2006, a group of alumni formed the nonprofit Blackwell School Alliance to preserve the school's history and secured a 99-year lease on the building from Marfa ISD. The Alliance gathered a collection of artifacts, photos, and memorabilia to display in the historic building and opened the site for limited hours of public visitation and as a venue for community events. In growing recognition of the property's historical value, Blackwell School was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2019 as a representation of the de facto racial segregation that existed across Texas into the mid-20th century and the education of Mexican American children and students of Mexican descent in Marfa between 1909 and 1965.



*Right: Photo courtesy of Blackwell School Alliance*