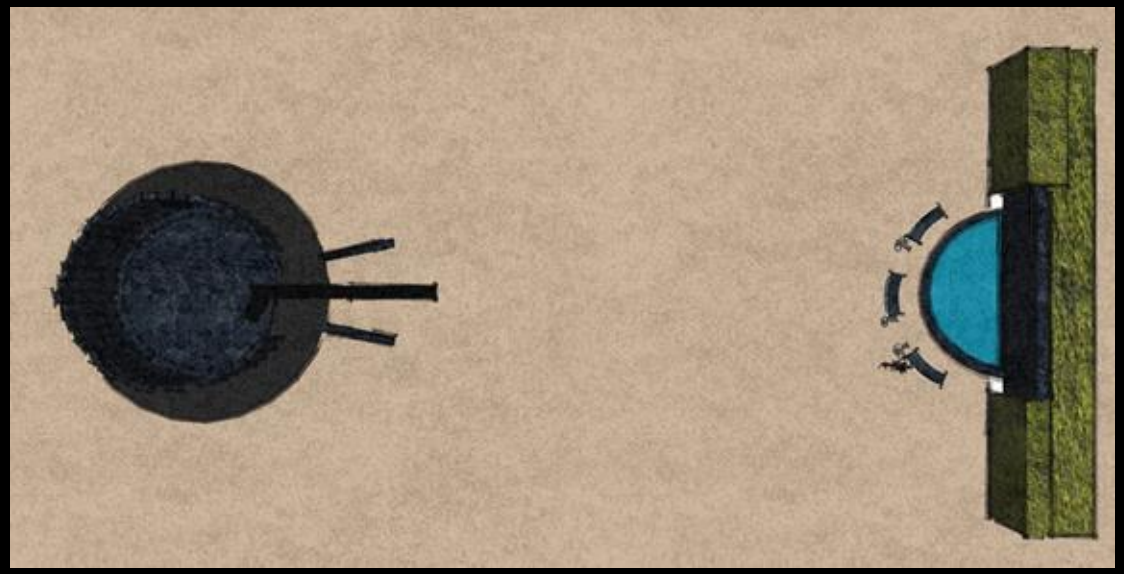


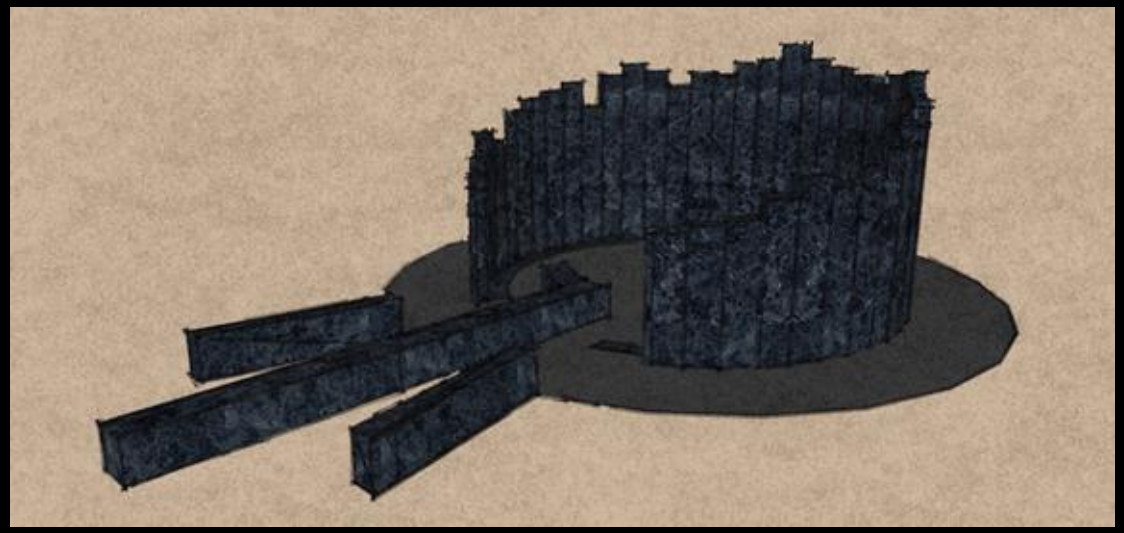
Student proposals for commemorating the histories of the Coming Street Commons site.

This slideshow presents student proposals from ARTH 396, *The Architecture of Memory*, developed in Spring 2026 as commemorative complements to the Coming Street Commons project at the College of Charleston. Focusing on the histories of the former municipal cemetery and the former YWCA site, these designs explore how memorial forms might acknowledge erased lives and Black community history.

Reflections at Coming Street

Presley Rhodes, Jake Sopp, and Davide Vallejos





This memorial centers on a ring of reflective marble tablets inscribed with eyes, hands, and faces of the enslaved, making visible those buried at the former municipal cemetery in Charleston. Each tablet also carries documents and statements related to the slave trade, foregrounding the city's role in this history. The tablets form an enclosed circle that opens onto a semicircular space with granite benches facing a granite wall of cascading water, creating a quiet space for contemplation. A path from the memorial intersects the route to the proposed Coming Street residence hall, underscoring how past and present meet in everyday movement across campus. Designed as a place of true rest, the stones emulate headstones with inscriptions dedicated to those impacted by the transatlantic slave trade, whose final victims are believed to be buried here. The modernist composition combines symbolic form and contemplative space, asking visitors to reflect on how this history shapes present conditions and to remember lives once lived yet largely forgotten, especially those of the enslaved.

Reflections at Coming Street

Presley Rhodes, Jake Sopp, and Davide Vallejos

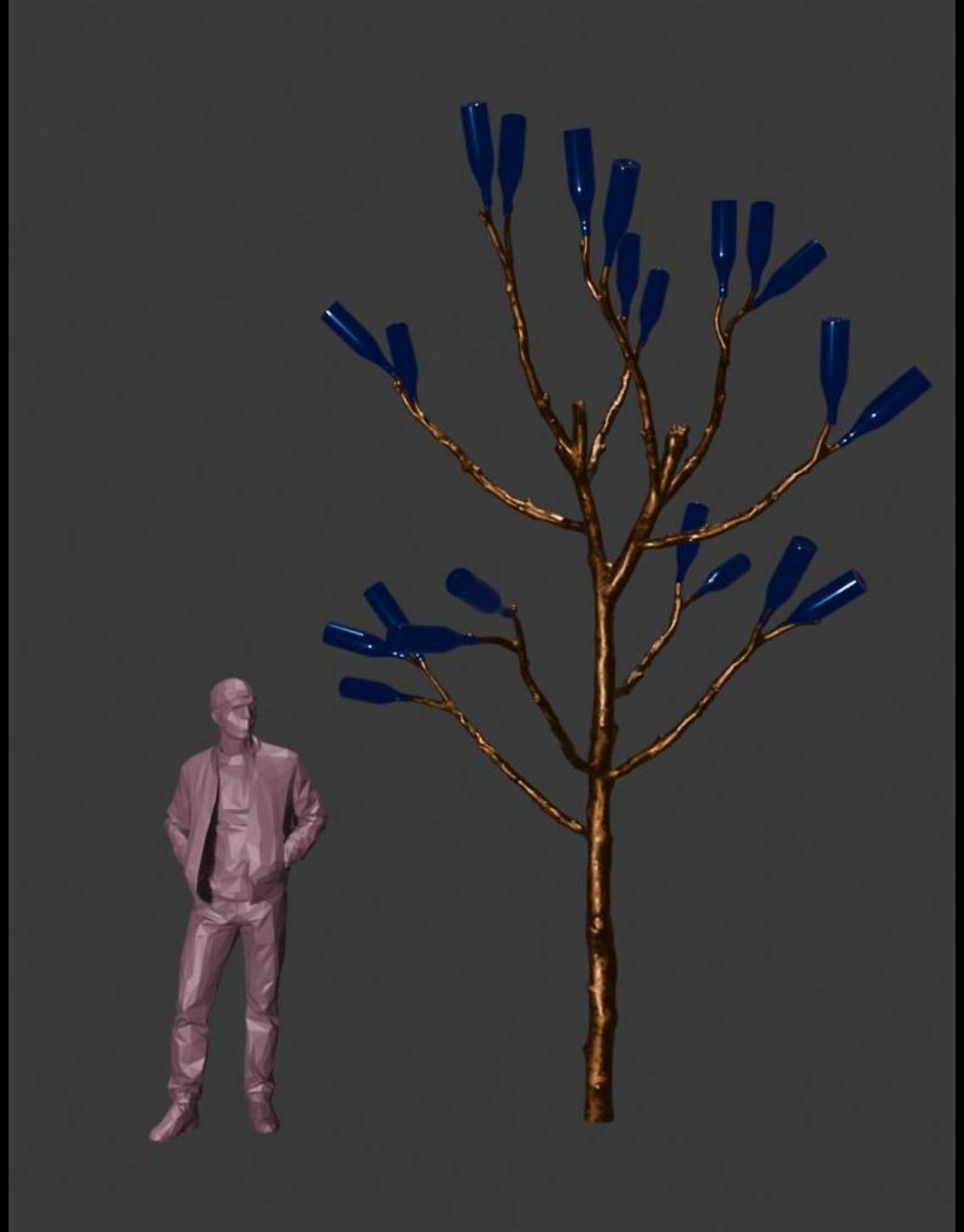




Memories Blooming

Aiden Broomfield, Genevieve Kuehn,
Melanie Bade, and Morgan Graybill

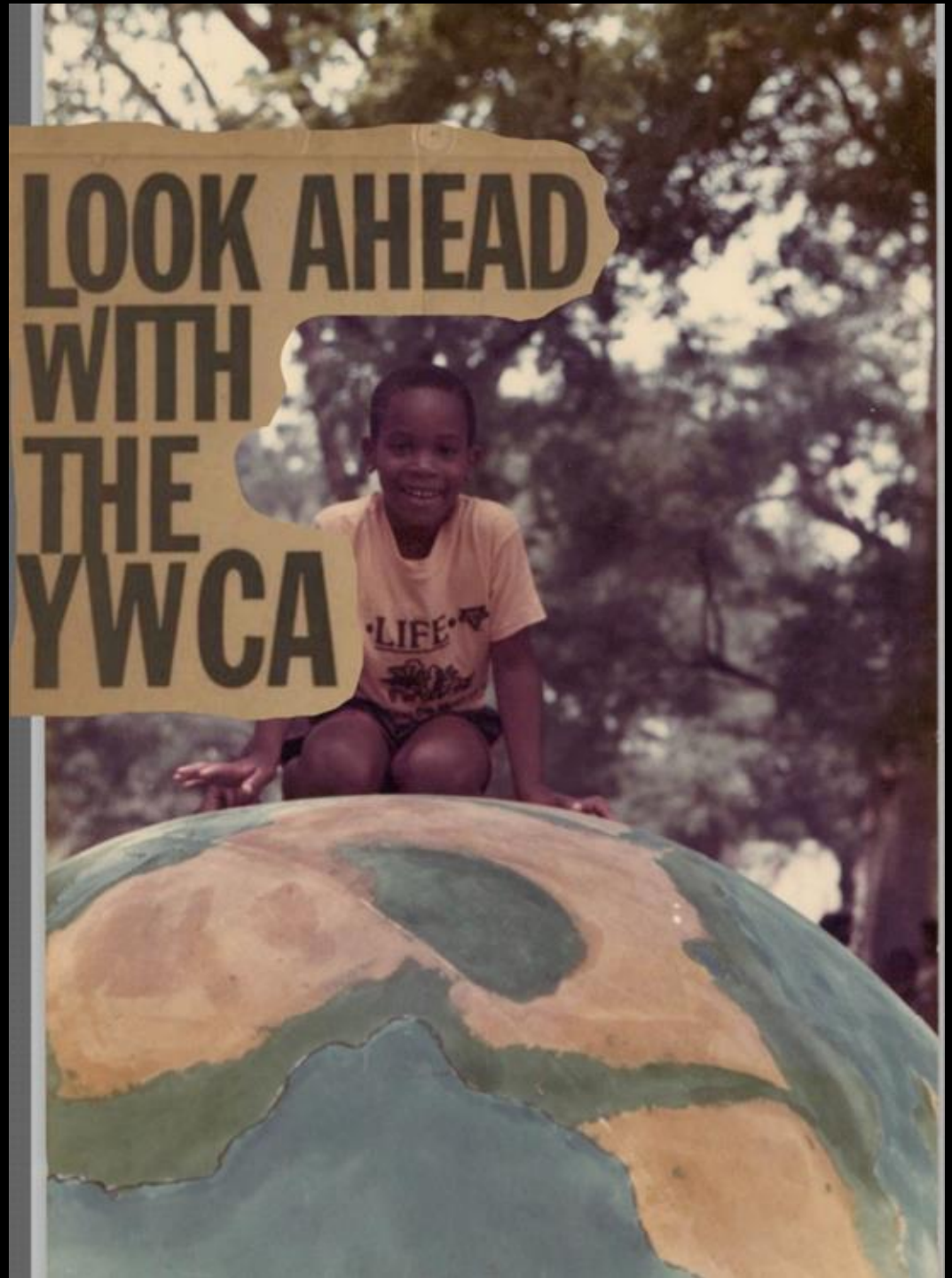
This memorial proposes a teardrop-shaped flower garden and contemplative space marked by a single, prominent plaque at its center, asserting this ground clearly and publicly as a graveyard. The garden honors the estimated 3,600 to 12,000 individuals buried here, including strangers, travelers, the destitute, enslaved and free Black people, and other marginalized residents who were excluded from churchyards and private cemeteries. At the center, an elevated platform of soil holds a large gravestone inscribed, “In remembrance of the people who lay and are buried here, for those unknown and known. This acts as your resting place.” Four types of flowers—chrysanthemums for honor and respect, hydrangeas for sincerity, lilies for remembrance, and lavender for healing—surround the marker and reappear at four benches arranged in a circle along the garden’s edge. Each bench is enclosed by one flower type and engraved with its symbolism, inviting visitors at the threshold of the new Coming Street dormitory into a space of reflection, recognition, and care.



Bottle Tree

Ella Humphries, Sarah Boike,
Kate Elkins, and Jacob Cutter

Bottle trees are a Kongo-derived tradition from Central Africa, where people hung glass bottles upside down on trees and structures to catch and neutralize wandering spirits, often understood as being lured by the vibrant color and held until daylight. Over time, related practices were carried through the transatlantic slave trade and adapted within enslaved communities in the American South, where “bottle trees” guarded homes and yards from harm. Drawing on this history, the proposal envisions a sculptural dead tree fitted with cobalt blue glass bottles, either perched on or suspended from its branches, to watch over the disturbed burial ground on Coming Street. The stark, lifeless trunk contrasts with the luminous glass, suggesting both violence and ongoing spiritual protection. A nearby plaque reads, “To protect those who have been laid to rest here,” explicitly naming the site as a resting place and extending the bottle tree’s protective power to those whose graves were erased or built over.



Archival Collage

Ella Humphries, Sarah Boike,
Kate Elkins, and Jacob Cutter

A mural along a heavily trafficked exterior wall of the Coming Street dormitory would represent local civil rights and YWCA history through a collage of elements pulled from the YWCA's archives. It would layer historic photographs, flyers, and slogans into a single composition to show how this chapter supported African American communities in Charleston across generations. Central to the collage is the phrase "look ahead with the YWCA," taken from historic promotional materials, visually linking past and future African American communities who used this resource. Images of children of different ages at YWCA day camps could appear alongside archival references to organizing and community programs, emphasizing both everyday life and civil rights activism. This YWCA chapter was critically important to the Civil Rights Movement, not just locally but nationally, through the work of women like Septima Clark and Christine Jackson. Placed along a daily walkway, the mural invites passersby to read the archival collage, the burial ground, and the surrounding campus as parts of the same ongoing story.



YWCA Memorial

Josie Brinkman, Marlow Longo,
Sarah Poteat, and Maddie Key

The YWCA represents a crucial chapter in Charleston's history, embodying the leadership and resilience of Black women during the Civil Rights era. It functioned not only as a community center but also as a hub for activism, education, and social support at a time when segregation sharply limited access to such resources. Guided by influential community leaders, it became a place where women organized, learned, and mobilized for racial and gender equality, and it should be remembered as a site of empowerment, community building, and resistance. The proposed monument expresses this legacy by visualizing continuity across generations through a bronze statue of four women and four girl children, arranged in paired figures from different eras to emphasize the enduring nature of Black women's struggles for justice. Four benches encircle the statue, while two flower beds flank the structure to create a calm, garden-like setting. Footprints set into the paving between the girls invite visitors to step into the scene for photos and interactive reflection, and a plaque at the front flowerbed offers a complete remembrance of the YWCA's impact, grounding history in human connection and shared struggle.

YWCA Memorial

Josie Brinkman, Marlow Longo,
Sarah Poteat, and Maddie Key



Live Oak Memorial

Addie Hanckel, Phebe Hardy,
and Isabel Shamamain



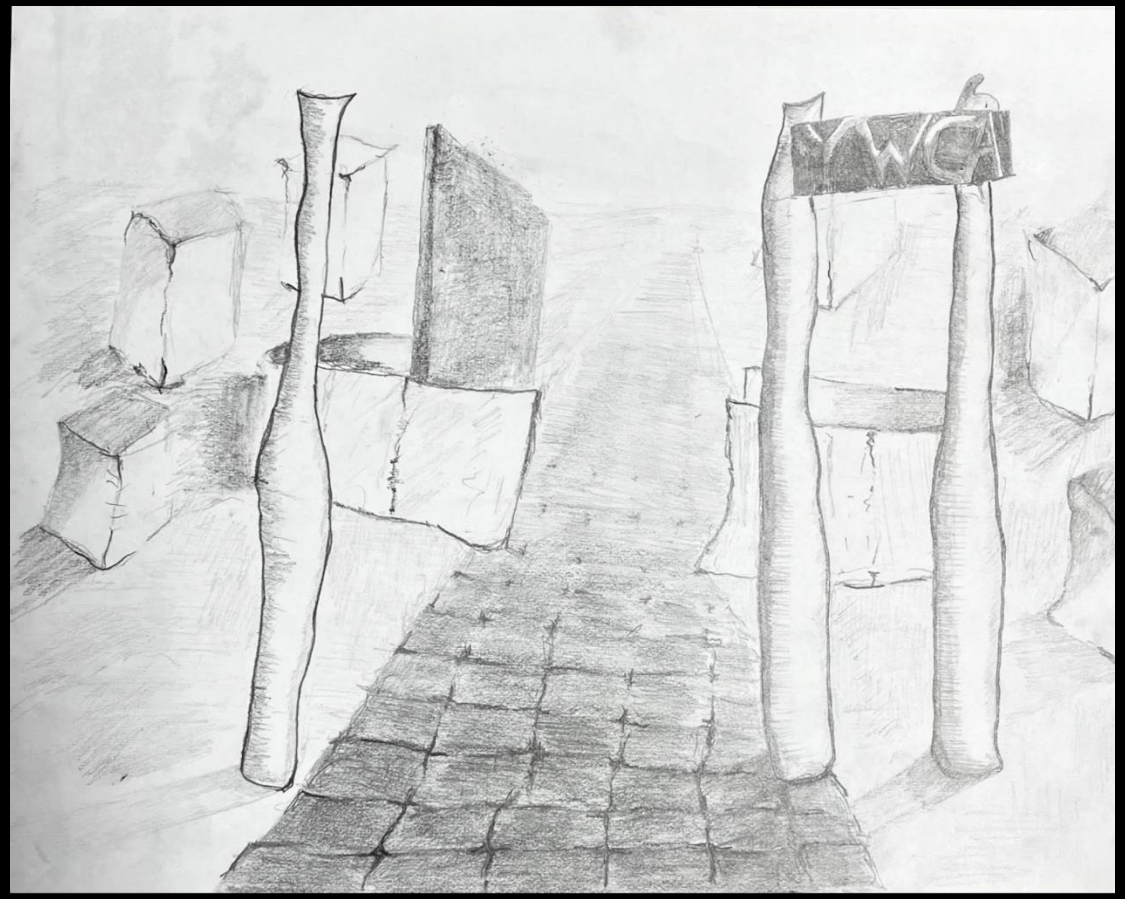
This proposal centers on commemoration of Charleston's former municipal cemetery while also acknowledging the legacy of the YWCA that once occupied this ground. Taking inspiration from the live oak tree, commonly seen across the American South, the memorial envisions a modern bronze tree form placed in the shared green space outside the new Coming Street dormitory. The tree's trunk and branches are open and inviting, with an exposed root system that appears to sink into the soil of the burial ground, visually drawing attention to those interred below. Inscriptions are integrated into the bark of the bronze, naming the cemetery's role as a public burial ground for immigrants, African Americans, children from the local orphanage, travelers, and those who were unclaimed. By lifting this imagery above ground in a space of everyday circulation and gathering, the memorial affirms the humanity of those buried here and encourages students and visitors to form an active relationship with the site, recognizing a shared, though unequal, human history that continues into the present.



Buried Truth

Marin Hunter and Maeve Cullina

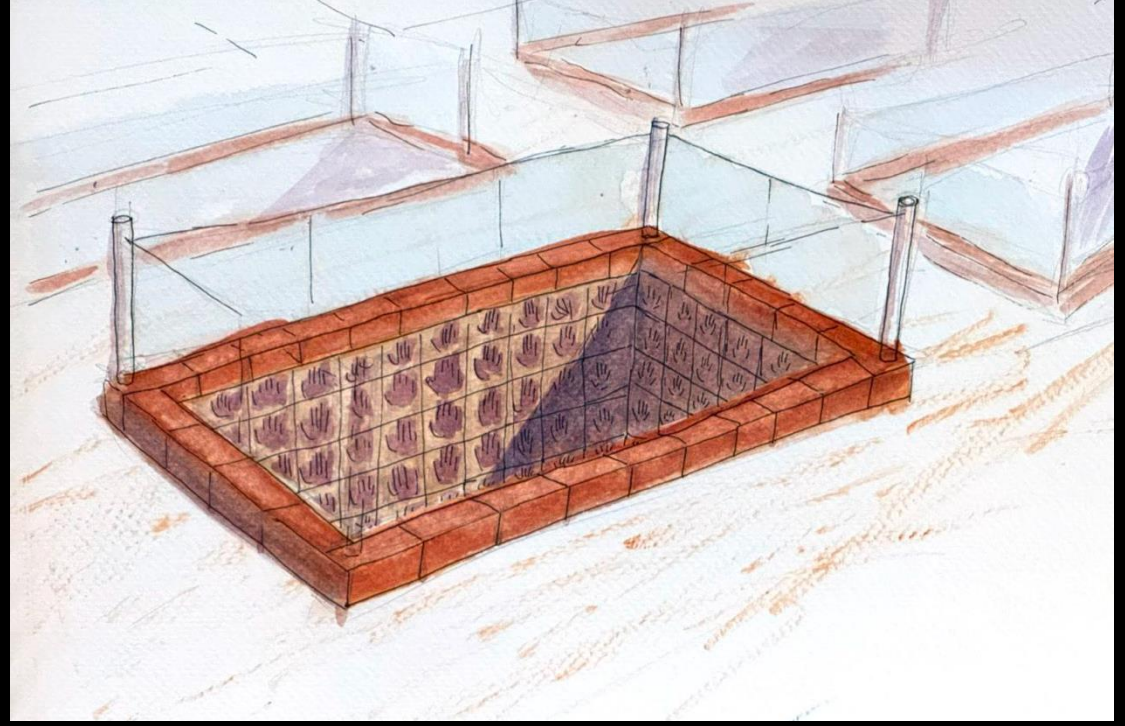
This memorial honors the nameless individuals buried at the former municipal cemetery in Charleston and centers the voices of marginalized communities long excluded from official histories. A memorial garden organized around a sculptural bronze fountain evokes the compact, crowded nature of burial on the site: stacked rectangular layers of bronze form the fountain's core, with shallow niches between them in which recumbent bronze figures lie side by side, their bodies intertwined with cast flowers associated with death, remembrance, strength through adversity, and reflection, chosen from the cultural traditions of the groups buried here. A path made of shell fragments—recalling both Lowcountry landscaping and the practice of placing seashells on graves to mark transatlantic journeys—traces a stylized Adinkra Sankofa symbol, leading to smaller sculptural elements designed by local minority artists. Live plantings echo the flowers in the fountain, while a ring of cypress trees frames the garden without shutting it off, marking it as a living memorial next to the Coming Street residence hall. Educational plaques integrated with the sculptures explain the cemetery's history, the symbolism of the design, and the broader pattern of relegating marginalized communities to sidelined, poorly maintained, and hostile spaces, inviting discomfort, deep engagement, and sustained reflection rather than easy reassurance.

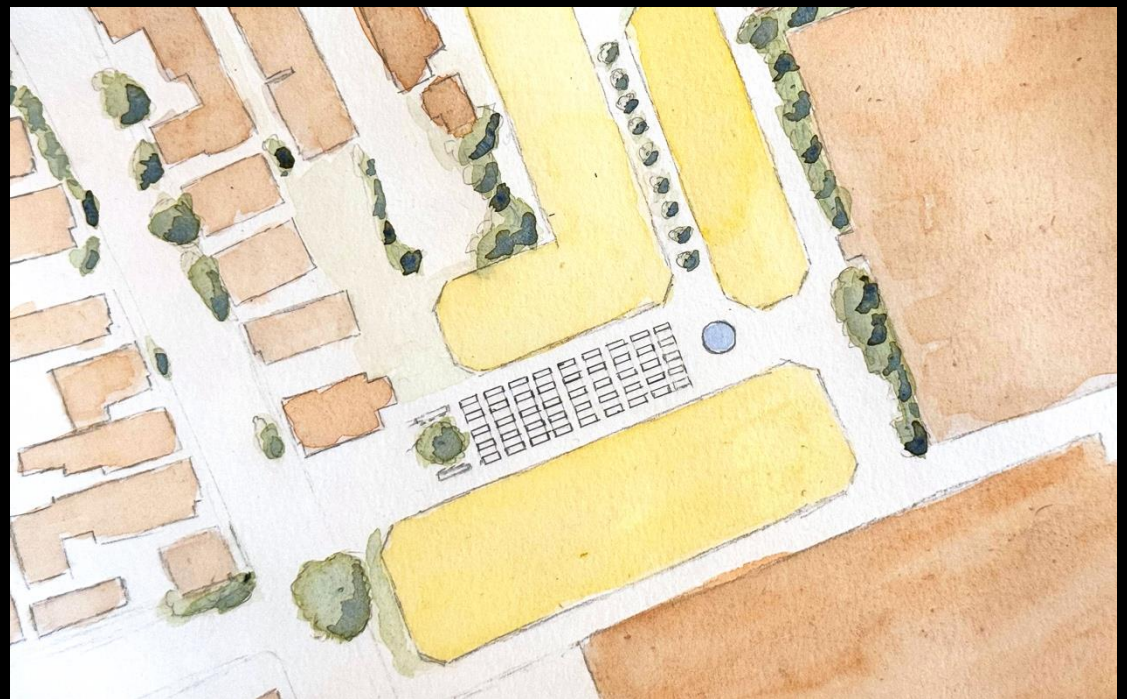


Blackboard Memorial

Audrey Curcio, Cameryn Cross,
Anna Baldovin, and Harrison Crawford

This memorial envisions a circular, interactive space that invites students, locals, and visitors to move with and through the intertwined histories of the YWCA building and Charleston's Civil Rights activism. Low perimeter walls with built-in benches define the circle and create areas for gathering, reflection, and informal learning, treating the space as both classroom and community room. At its center, a freestanding blackboard carved in relief on both sides presents historical information about the YWCA and Charleston's role in the Civil Rights Movement; set diagonally within the circle, it symbolizes disruption of unjust orders and the insistence on speaking out. Cubic stone forms of varying heights stand along the walls, representing individual and collective voices across generations, each bearing inscriptions tied to specific figures and their stories. Three entrance pillars echo the original YWCA façade, marking a symbolic threshold into a building that no longer stands. Using stone, oyster shells, concrete, brick, and iron, the memorial connects to Charleston's architectural landscape and, positioned near the dorms and sidewalk, functions as an everyday gathering and learning space.





Burial Memorial

Jack Jemison, Desire' Johnson, and Lily Walt

This proposal commemorates the municipal cemetery beneath the Coming Street site, which holds an unknown number of late eighteenth-century burials of Charleston's disenfranchised, including enslaved and free African Americans, travelers, orphans, and the poor. It takes the form of a 9×5 grid of life-sized, empty grave-like forms, each roughly three by eight feet, sunk into the ground so that visitors must look down into them. The interiors are lined with clay tiles imprinted with the hands of locals, descendants, advocates, and others who see themselves in those buried, creating hundreds of overlapping handprints that stand in for the missing bodies. The act of pressing one's hand into wet clay functions as a belated funerary ritual for people who were denied proper rites, while the array as a whole makes their loss physically visible and activates the ground as a site of memory. A plaque at the front of the memorial provides historical context about the cemetery's dates, numbers, and demographics, transforming an overlooked burial ground into an acknowledged presence in everyday campus life.



Christine Jackson Memorial Fountain

Jack Jemison, Desire’ Johnson, and Lily Walt

The Christine Jackson Memorial Fountain, located near the footprint of the 1964 YWCA building, features a carved relief of Christine Jackson—director of the YWCA from 1966 to 2003, organizer of Charleston’s Martin Luther King Jr. parade, and collaborator with figures such as Septima Clark and Coretta Scott King—and provides a steady wash of sound that sets a tone of reverence. A museum at 110 Coming Street adapts the historic single house at the front of the site, with a first floor for rotating exhibitions curated by institutions like the Avery Research Center or visiting artists, a second floor dedicated to local Civil Rights history (including the 1963 Charleston Movement, the 1969 Hospital Strike, early streetcar sit-ins, and Frederick Douglass’s 1888 visit), and a third-floor studio for an artist-in-residence. Together, the fountain and museum preserve the YWCA’s role as a conduit for Black women’s organizing while expanding Charleston’s commemorative landscape to foreground stories, archives, and creative work that have long remained peripheral.