

The city's beginnings as a Spanish colony, both free and enslaved Africans played key roles in Florida's story.

RESILIENCE: CENTERING BLACK HERITAGE IN ST. AUGUSTINE

Authors:

Laura Marion
Collections Coordinator

Casey Wooster
Collections Assistant



Stereographs—like this one by Underwood & Underwood in 1903—offer a glimpse of the faces of St. George Street over a century ago.

Social unrest, isolation, and uncertainty marked 2020. We all bore witness to our nation's reckoning with issues of racial inequalities in the wake of George Floyd's death. The historic summer touched all corners of the country—including St. Augustine, Florida. As practitioners and educators of history, local cultural and educational institutions came together to ask questions: How can we be better allies to Black St. Augustinians?

How can we move beyond a European-centered narrative? Whose stories remain left-out and how can we uplift their voices?

Through a series of virtual conversations, "Resilience: Black Heritage in St. Augustine"—a year-long celebration throughout 2021—emerged as a community collaboration. Governor's House Library is honored to help facilitate and contribute to this project intended to better center the many contributions that the Black

community made and continues to make in St. Augustine.

After all, from the city's beginnings as a Spanish colony, both free and enslaved Africans played key roles in Florida's story. When the Spanish conquistador Pedro Menendez founded St. Augustine in 1565, his ships landed with both free and enslaved Africans—54 years before the first enslaved Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619. By the 1700s, the city became a sanctuary for those able

"We all have a story,



The bell in the logo for "Resilience: Black Heritage In St. Augustine" represents freedom and liberty, themes interwoven into the city's past and present.



The collections in the Governor's House Library provide insight on the people behind the city's historic preservation efforts, such as that of George Washington (left) and Sam Row's (right) craftsmanship in reconstructing the Old Blacksmith Shop in 1967.

to escape slavery in neighboring English colonies. This spurred the creation of the first legally recognized community of free Africans—known as Fort Mose. Over the past 455+ years, St. Augustinians of African-heritage exercised hope, resilience, and liberty in the face of ever changing political and social tides.

In recognizing these dreams alongside the ideals of liberty and inclusion, we can more fully explore the many aspects of St. Augustine's tale. Kimberlyn Elliott, Associate Director of the Lincolnvile Museum and Cultural Center, explains that "when we look at the events of the Emancipation Reading [March 11, 1862, in St. Augustine, Florida]

and Juneteenth [June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Texas], they are celebrations of liberation and of the promise of potential. The potential to participate fully in American society. The potential to be treated as a human being."

"Resilience: Black Heritage St. Augustine" aims to bring together the many threads of Black history interwoven into the city. To do so, we created a website highlighting resources for exploring and learning more about Black experiences in St. Augustine. This includes featuring institutions and places to visit, archives and collections, educational resources, and a calendar with virtual and in-person events. During 2021, collaborating institutions

are hosting a variety of programming, including lectures, exhibits, digital humanities projects, and special tours.

"We all have a story, we all have collections, and we all have a lot to bring to the table," explains Casey Wooster, Collections Assistant of Governor's House Library. "And as part of this effort, we've been able to take a deeper dive, reflect on our own collections. For even when you think you understand your collections, looking again with a new lens often reveals overlooked stories."

As part of the project, Governor's House Library, in collaboration with George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of

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Digging into the archives at Governor's House Library, we find stories that bring history to life, like that of Mrs. Lizzie Murray and her turnovers at the Old Spanish Bakery in 1968.



Governor's House Library's photographic collection captures many scenes of tourism on St. George Street from the 1950s to the 1990s, including this one in front of the Oldest Schoolhouse.

Florida and Lincolnville Cultural Center and Museum, presented a two-part virtual panel series on July 1 and July 22, 2021, exploring the past, present, and future of Fort Mose's historical and archaeological legacy. Today's environmental and cultural forces affect our future understanding of the site's past as sea levels rise and historical narratives change over time. These initiatives, taken on by individual libraries, archives, and museums, work together to tell the important story of Black St. Augustinians and their many contributions to our city and culture over the centuries.

Laura Marion, Collections Coordinator at Governor's House

Library reiterates that, "we are fortunate to be affiliated with the University of Florida and have access to its many resources. It is an honor to have the ability to use those towards making our community a better place to live and shaping the stories that will be part of St. Augustine's historical narrative in years to come."

Collaborating institutions include: Accord Civil Rights Museum & Freedom Trail, Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, Flagler College Proctor Library, Flagler College Honors Program, Florida Museum of Natural History, Fort Mose Historical Society, Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center, St. Augustine Historical

Society, St. Johns County Public Library, System, Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve, University of North Florida Digital Humanities Institute, and Ximenez-Fatio House Museum.

To learn more about "Resilience: Black Heritage in St. Augustine," visit resilienceblackheritage-instaugustine.wordpress.com or follow along on Facebook at [resilienceblackheritagestaugustine](https://www.facebook.com/resilienceblackheritagestaugustine).

Governor's House Library is managed jointly by UF Historic St. Augustine, Inc., and the UF George A. Smathers Libraries. The library is open for researchers by appointment Monday-Friday.

<https://govhouse.uflib.ufl.edu/>