The St. Augustine Issue

A Lien On Lincolnville

BY MICHAEL ADNO (HTTPS://INDOEK.COM/AUTHOR/MICHAEL-ADNO/) (HTTPS://INDOEK.COM/AUTHOR/) (HTTPS://INDOEK.COM/AUTHOR/) (HTTPS://INDOEK.COM/AUTHOR/) (HTTPS://INDOEK.COM/AUTHOR/) (HTTPS://INDOEK.COM/AUTHOR/) (HTTPS://INDOEK.COM/AUTHOR/)

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Michael Adno

A town’s inability to celebrate its past comes to haunt it.

A Victorian style home along Martin Luther King Avenue in Lincolnville

Michael Adno

In the oldest city in America, deep in the South, two histories have been told as two others are written. St. Augustine has long been a small, charming city that's a potent weathervane for the nation, from land-grabbing conquistadors to hegemonic railroad barons and Civil Rights firebrands. Now, the city's black history and culture is facing off against the slow, quiet creep of gentrification as the city, county, and residents come to reckon with the Ancient City's past. Will one of America's most important Civil Rights sites be razed to pursue the promise of development? Or will the true history of St. Augustine be told — as the whole story.

“We believe white dominance to be a fact of the inert past, a delinquent debt that can be made to disappear if only we don’t look.”

— Ta-Nehisi Coates,
“The Case for Reparations”

The History

They call St. Augustine the Ancient City because, in 1513, Spanish conquistadors arrived, took the land from the natives by force and established a colonial settlement on a thumb of limestone they called Florida — from “florido,” full of flowers.

That fleet of ships, led by Juan Ponce de Leon, led to Spain establishing the first European settlement in North America, earning St. Augustine the moniker of the oldest city in America. Of course, indigenous people had lived on this land for 14,000 years, at the least.

Ponce de Leon and Christopher Columbus garnered the title of “discoverers” and earned a litany of namesake holidays, housing subdivisions and public parks, but this land was in fact already found. It was simply a foreign place with a name they

didn't know and a history they didn't care to learn — due to arrogance, dominance or maybe because it wasn't written down.

When Ponce de Leon stepped onto the coarse sand of Florida's East Coast, he brought both enslaved and free Africans with him, many from Havana. Slavery was not a prominent enterprise in the first Spanish period in Florida — outside of construction labor and slaves provided by neighboring Indian Chiefs. But when Pedro Menendez de Aviles arrived in St. Augustine fifty years later to officially declare St. Augustine a Spanish settlement, the Crown decreed that he would import 500 slaves within 3 years.

In the decades to follow, as the English colonized the central and northern East Coast, Spain retained control of Florida. From 1687 onward, Spain declared that if any slave from the northern colonies could make the journey through the swamps and hollers into Spanish territory and then profess their belief in Roman Catholicism, they would be set free. For those seeking freedom from the New World's establishment slavery, Florida was the promised land.

In 1738, 38 men established Gracia Real de Santa Teresa or Fort Mose (https://bittersoutherner.com/the-first-floridians-fort-mose-st-augustine), just north of St. Augustine, serving as the Spanish line of defense against the English colony further north. Because so many runaway slaves composed the cavalry at Fort Mose, it was the first all-black settlement in what is now U.S. Territory.

Under the Treaty of Paris, in 1763, the Spanish were forced to cede Florida. They set sail through the Straits to Cuba, and records indicate that 3,104 people left under the Spanish mast on longboats. 350 were slaves.

In St. Augustine, the Spanish left behind a charming, storied little slice of Europe that is now the Spanish Quarter. As St. Augustine historian Amy Howard wrote, "Stories of our past

have been a vital source of income ever since." But, the Ancient City didn't celebrate all of its past, much of which was painful.

By 1777, nascent British plantations brought 3,000 slaves to Florida. In the following century, the territory was colonized under five flags: Spanish, British, French, American and Confederate. On the eve of the Civil War, there were 61,000 slaves in the State, which made up half of the territory's population.

The American slave trade was outlawed in 1808, but Florida didn't become a U.S. Territory until 1821, and it served as a backdoor into the Deep South, where traders slipped across the Florida-Georgia border. The Clotilda, the last slave ship to bring human cargo to these shores, heeled through the narrow bayous of the Mobile Delta in Alabama as late as 1860. As to how slaves arrived in St. Augustine after America acquired the territory, historians reach different conclusions. But presumably, planters from Georgia, the Carolinas, and Alabama lured further South by the new territory brought slaves with them. The same slice of scrub that was once the promised land became forlorn under the star spangled banner.

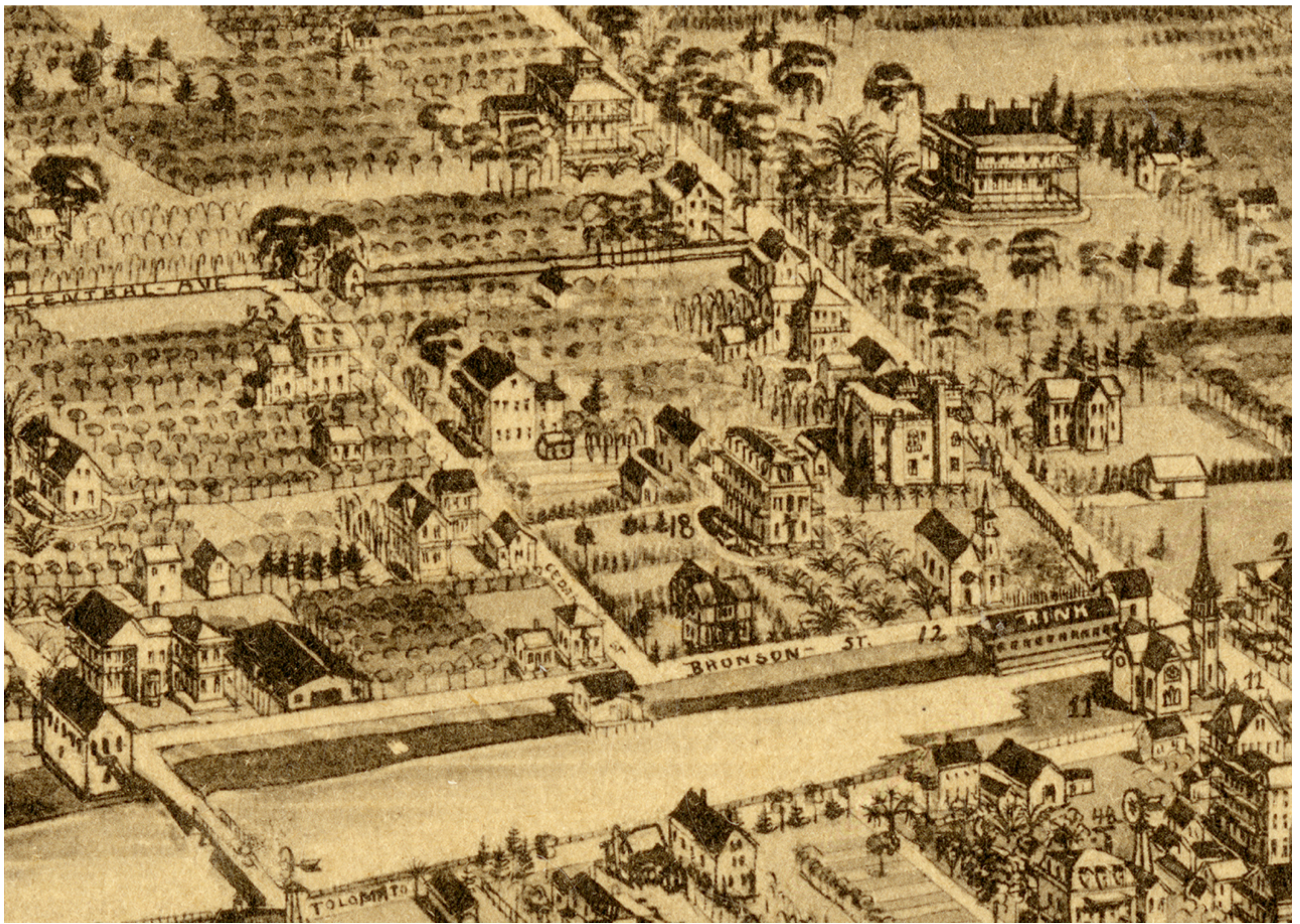
For many residents of St. Augustine today, slavery never existed there — despite the former slave market in town's central square, la Plaza de la Constitucion, and first-hand accounts of slave auctions from colonists who'd passed through the City's gates. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of the auctions himself when visiting in 1827. "There is something wonderfully piquant in the manners of the place, theological or civil," Emerson observed after attending a Bible Society meeting that coincided with a slave auction. Within earshot, Emerson listened as a woman with four children was auctioned off, separated from her children. "One ear therefore heard the glad tidings of great joy whilst the other was relegated with 'going gentleman, going!'"

The deeper you dig, the more you'll find that the record of St. Augustine is often contradictory, perforated in rumor, and anything but clear. What follows is officially on record.

Three days before Florida officially seceded from the Union, a militia stormed Fort Marion in St. Augustine on January 7, 1861. Less than a month later, the State joined the Confederacy and held St. Augustine until 1862 when Union forces sailed toward the fort, raising a white flag. Later that year, when President Abraham Lincoln wrote his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, slave-owners in Union controlled strongholds within Confederate states like Florida were made to free their slaves, immediately.

Some historians believe St. Augustine may have been one of the first cities to read the Proclamation publicly. Beneath the shade of an oak tree along Cordova Street in an expansive lot at the edge of the Quarter (present-day Lincolnville) — nearly 700 men, women, and children, stolen away and carried across the sea were gathered for a ceremony where they were made free.

Along the margins of the former plantations south of the Quarter, those freed slaves founded a settlement called Africa, building homes along the Maria Sanchez Creek not far from where the ceremony took place. In 1866, residents renamed the settlement Lincolnville, honoring the slain president who abolished slavery.



A birds-eye view of Lincolnville in 1885

Florida Map Collection, State Library of Florida

St. Augustine's next great movement rode in with the developer and railroad baron Henry Flagler. He arrived in St. Augustine in 1885 and embarked on his own colonial conquest. In 1888, he opened a hotel on the edge of the Spanish Quarter, naming it the Hotel Ponce de Leon. Across the street, he built the Hotel Alcazar. And caddy-corner, he renovated another hotel named The Cordova. He continued building hotels and railroads until the end of the road in Key West; he hoped to lure Yankees to the land of flower. Hotel Ponce de Leon, now Flagler College, is a favorite among tourists due to its unusual architecture. Instead of being assembled piece by piece, it was literally poured in successive molds with coquina aggregate. This method was modeled after the Villa Zorayda, diagonally across from

the site. Flagler hired two young architects, John Carrére and Thomas Hastings, who would later go on to design the Schwartzman Branch of the New York Public Library. The Ponce de Leon's rotunda was a sub-tropical precursor to the ambitions of the Rose Reading Room in New York City.

Like all of Florida, St. Augustine was built on a spit of muck that pushed above the ocean's surface in the Pleistocene age, but what was unknown to explorers and developers was that it would eventually return to the Atlantic. Where the gates of Flagler College stand today, a creek once wound its way through mangroves and hammocks of live oaks, but in order to build his second hotel across the street, Flagler filled the creek — flattening the land to make room for profit in the form of a hotel. At one point, the creek ran up the peninsula between the San Sebastian and Matanzas rivers, skirted by an archipelago of oyster beds and spartina grass.

South of the Spanish Quarter and along the now-filled creek, two plantations occupied the terminus of the peninsula. The southern tip belonged to the Buena Esperanza plantation, Spanish for "good hope." And, north of Buena Esperanza, the Yalaha plantation, named after the Seminole word for orange, crept up to the Quarter.

Throughout the last quarter of the 19th century, the founders of Lincolnville hemmed in this little slice of swamp and played a vital role in the overall community. Lincolnville's residents held public office in St. Augustine and during the reconstruction era (1865-1877), Florida had one of the densest concentrations of African-Americans in local and state office. They also had the country's first Jewish representative. But by the turn of the century, the specter of Southern embitterment returned in the form of poll taxes and literacy tests to disenfranchise voters. It was a sign of what the next 70 years would bear witness to — Jim Crow, Segregation and the Separate but Equal doctrine. In 1902, Marshal Bent (a white man), shot a black elected city council alderman, John Papino. Papino survived the shooting, and Bent turned himself into the Sheriff, but no conviction came.

The precedent haunted the city. No person of color would serve again as an elected official in the Ancient City until 1973.

After being turned away from the ballot box, Lincolnville residents turned inward. By 1920, Lincolnville was filled with homeowners, local businesses, schools, and 16 churches. By the mid 1950s, protests against Southern segregation grew, coming to a head in St. Augustine in 1964 when it became a focal point in the Civil Rights Movement.

Demonstrations had taken place in 1963, but the movement in 1964 grew exponentially. Students from all over the country poured into town — followed by sit-ins, wade-ins at whites only beaches, and marches. Leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) arrived, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

A local dentist, Dr. Robert Hayling, became instrumental in the movement, attracting national media and Civil Rights leaders, ultimately leading to Dr. King's arrival. Reports released by the FBI five decades later highlighted the violence in town preceding King's presence.

September, 1963: Dr. Hayling caught wind of a Klan rally outside town and went to check it out from the side of U.S. 1 at what he assumed to be a safe distance. With three other men, they were caught, beaten, dragged into the middle of a group set aglow by the burning cross, and beaten further. The mob broke Hayling's hands after learning he was a dentist. Four Klan members were charged with assault but later acquitted. Hayling was said to have possessed a gun, which led to an assault conviction and a $100 fine.

October, 1963: A live hand grenade was thrown into a black juke joint. Victims were also sprayed with shotgun buckshot and .22 caliber rifle fire. Further down Volusia Street, two homes were shot. A day later, William D. Kinard, a white man rumored to be a Klansman, was shot in the head while driving down a street in Lincolnville near the home of NAACP Leader Goldie Eubanks, "cradling in his arms a shotgun which

discharged through the floor of the automobile when he was hit," according to Harper's magazine. Three nights later, two black businesses and a residence were showered in shotgun fire. The following night, another.

November, 1963: An informant overheard a conversation in Ships Bar where three men discussed a reward of $500 for the death of Dr. Hayling. The same report mentioned that civilians now carried loaded weapons in their cars.

February, 1964: Bullets tore through the siding of Dr. Hayling's house, nearly hitting his pregnant wife and killing their dog. He took his family to Tallahassee and returned to St. Augustine alone.

After garnering the support of the SCLC, hordes of students, activists, segregationists and reporters descended on the town. The demonstrations were consistent through the summer of 1964, and with Dr. King's arrival, the violence and tension increased. When the local paper published directions on how to reach the home Dr. King was staying at on Anastasia Island, the place was soon-after riddled with bullets.

Along the waterfront of Matanzas Bay, just a short distance from the former slave market and along the edge of the Quarter, the Monson Motor Lodge became a central site of protest for the movement, with sit-ins and marches. On June 11, within the frame of a door that led to the restaurant, the Monson's manager — James Brock — stood like a sentry, preventing King and eight other demonstrators from entering.

The New York Times reported (https://www.nytimes.com/1964/06/12/archives/martin-luther-king-and-17-others-jailed-trying-to-integrate-st.html) this exchange:

Dr. King asked if Mr. Brock understood the "humiliation our people have to go through." Mr. Brock replied he would integrate his business if the substantial white citizens of the community asked him to or if he were served with a Federal Court order.

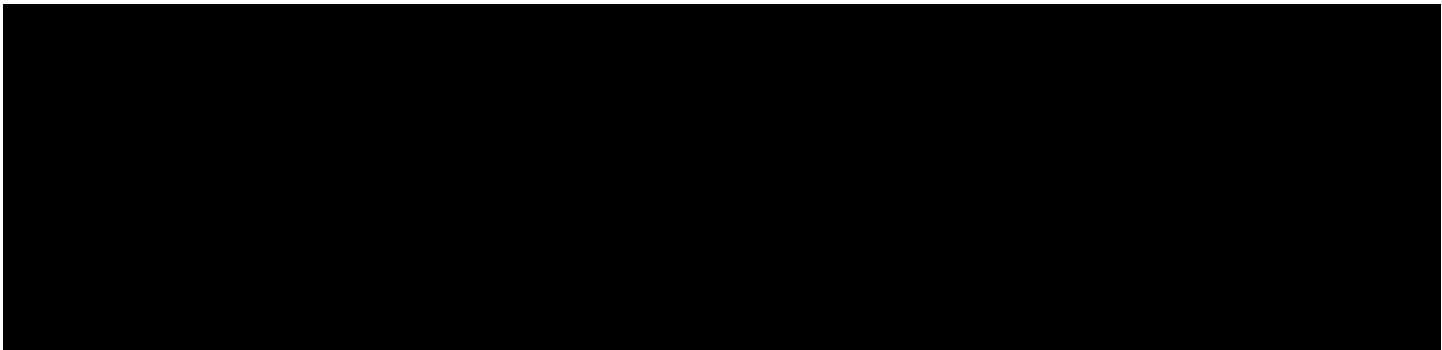
“You realize it would be detrimental to my business to serve you here,” Mr. Brock said. “I have unfortunately had to arrest 84 persons here since Easter.”

On that day, King and 17 other demonstrators were arrested on the steps of the Monson for attempting to be served. This was the only place King was arrested in Florida but one of many times he was arrested in his lifetime.

A few days later, violence reached a fevered pitch with a gruesome feud at the plaza that left 45 injured.

A week after King’s arrest on June 18, demonstrators returned to the Monson with King, and rather than a sit in, they made for the pool. As a contingency of Rabbis that King had invited to join the movement held a pray-in on the grounds of the Monson, they provided enough distraction for nine people to jump into the whites only pool, followed by one off duty police officer trying to shuttle them out. Captured in a litany of photographs that traveled around the world, James Brock poured gallons of muriatic acid into the pool as the demonstrators clung together in terror.

That image of a white man clad in sunglasses dumping acid into a pool filled with black people became a dial on the moral compass of the American South and more broadly of America. The words of King and Civil Rights leaders extended well beyond the borders of America and, in turn, put pressure on President Johnson to act. In response, on July 2nd — 14 days after the Monson Motor Lodge incident — the 1964 Civil Rights Act was signed by President Johnson with MLK by his side.



In October of that year, King won the Nobel Peace Prize. And in March of 1965, the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, like the demonstrations in St. Augustine, garnered the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

After St. Augustine made the slow push toward desegregation in the late 1960s, with the specter of violence still hanging around, assimilation significantly altered Lincolnville. Black-owned businesses began to dissolve, schools integrated, and by 1980, many people moved out of the neighborhood. Even Dr. Hayling moved away from St. Augustine. “I stayed as long as I could,” he told Craig Pittman of the Tampa Bay Times in 2014, 50 years after the town’s watershed demonstrations. Many pursued promise elsewhere, and many felt as though the demonstrations in 1964 and the backlash in 1965 revealed just how rotten the Ancient City really was.

Through attrition, parts of Lincolnville began to slip away. By proxy, a vital part of St. Augustine’s heritage was lost. Linconville’s stories were passed from generation to generation, and with the shift in demographics came a collective loss of memory. Some residents of St. Augustine, quick to forget the nuanced aspects of Lincolnville’s past, didn’t see the partially run-down neighborhood as a place with a past worth celebrating — rather, they viewed it as an eyesore and a painful reminder of unfond memories.

Like Flagler had filled Maria Sanchez creek to build the Alcazar, the City of St. Augustine was also willing to bury and forget the less palatable parts of its history.

Michael Adno

Christian Delfino

The Writer

Growing up in Florida — born in St. Petersburg and raised in Sarasota a bit further south on the Gulf Coast — St. Augustine was like Miami, a national stand-in for the rest of the state.

Many people's impressions of Florida are limited to Disney, Art Basel, South Beach, rednecks, Jimmy Buffett, alligators in top hats, the Bush/Gore recount of 2000, golf courses, and the oldest town in America, St. Augustine. When I lived in Jacksonville back in 2010, I'd occasionally visit St. Augustine to surf, but I never stepped foot in town beyond the gas stations or grocery stores. Then a year ago, I arrived to retrace the footsteps of a guy named Ernest Mickler for a story I was reporting for The Bitter Southerner (http://bittersoutherner.com/the-short-and-brilliant-life-of-ernest-matthew-mickler/), a piece that looked at the effect his anthology "White Trash Cooking" had on the national perception of Southerners and also covered the stories of men who died of AIDS during the height of the epidemic in the rural South.

When I visited the St. Augustine Historical Society, I parked in Lincolnville and walked into the historic quarter. On that walk, I fell in love with the neighborhood. The place stayed with me. And when the editors of this magazine approached me to work on a story of St. Augustine, I jumped at the opportunity. I knew the town had a deep, storied past, one that eschewed some of the flimsy narratives that tend to fetishize Florida.

Before returning to report on the city, I talked to my friend Ty Williams, who built a house in Lincolnville with his father in 2014. Williams asked me what I was going to write, and I mentioned some ideas about Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings or Zora Neale Hurston. St. Augustine's history, I thought, fit with most stories in Florida. They all conjured up colonial ties, social fault lines, and a rather strange mélange of characters present since the state became a U.S. Territory. And, as a first-generation American born to Jewish parents

from different hemispheres of the world and then raised in Florida, these stories helped me find a root, helped me towards some semblance of belonging.

Williams asked me if I knew anything about Lincolnville.

I knew the flyover of it being a settlement founded by freed slaves, and I remembered my walks through the area. I recalled the concentration of Victorian architecture, and I knew it had an inextricable tie to the Civil Rights Movement. But that was all I knew of its history.

Williams told me I should take a closer look. And he noted: look not only at what it was, but more importantly, what it was becoming.

David Nolan, a local historian and civil rights activist, outside the ACCORD Civil Rights Museum in Lincolnville, the State of Florida's only museum devoted to Civil Rights history

Michael Adno

The Historian

On a serpentine boulevard that carves along the island neighborhood known as Davis Shores, a canopy of live oaks floats above the route to David Nolan's house.

Nolan is an architectural and Civil Rights historian who was active during the Movement. He moved to St. Augustine in 1977 and fell under the spell of the town's charm — and its deep past. There was a lot of primary material for a historian to mine.

After being contracted to survey some of the city's historic buildings in the late 70s, city officials and old-timers in town told Nolan not to bother with Lincolnville. They told him there was no history there — at least none they were interested in. Instead of looking away, he looked closer.

Nolan is soft-spoken and quick to smile. His hair is well kempt and judging by the sheer number of books in his home, you could describe him as serious. The sandals, shorts, and his collection of rubber duckies tell another story, complementing his cynical sense of humor. During our first meeting at his house, not far from the Matanzas River and Lincolnville, we talked for two hours before we walked through the kitchen out into the garage and set off toward Lincolnville.

In 2002, Nolan, along with several others, hatched the idea to establish ACCORD, the Anniversary to Commemorate the Civil Rights Demonstrations. In 2004, the non-profit was incorporated with Gwendolyn Duncan as its president, and its inception spurred annual events to celebrate the role St. Augustine played in the Civil Rights movement. In 2007, the organization unveiled ten markers to highlight specific sites inextricably tied to the local movement under the moniker of the Freedom Trail. In 2008, another 10 followed. Today, there are 31 sites on the Freedom Trail. On July 2, 2014, fifty years after the Civil Rights Act was passed, ACCORD unveiled Florida's first Civil Rights Museum in Lincolnville, aptly located in the former dental office of Dr. Hayling. It remains the only museum in the state devoted to Civil Rights entirely.

We hooked off King Street toward Lincolnville and moved down Grenada Street in the shadow of the former Alcazar, now City Hall. Nolan unpacked the most pervasive approach to preservation promulgated by the city throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In so many words, it encouraged homeowners to demolish what they deemed "Victorian garbage" and rebuild in a Spanish style home with faux finish. City officials wanted the town to have a copasetic aesthetic — one that was aligned with the Spanish history they were celebrating up the road in the historic district.

"We had urban renewal," Nolan said. "We just dressed it up in colonial costumes."

Pushing down a vein of sun-bleached pavement, we came to a stand of buildings in disrepair. One was clearly a church, but the others were less distinct. Nolan began rattling off the building's past lives: SCLC headquarters. NAACP Office. St. Mary's Church where MLK spoke and where demonstrations in 1964 centered, and the same church where Nolan first spoke about St. Augustine's black history in 1978. Across the way was the former Lincolnville Bar, movie theatre, and Odd Fellows Hall. With Nolan as my host, the dormant, two-story cinder block buildings with jalousie windows started to hum. The place came alive.

"This place right here was Civil Rights central," he said looking off toward a modest house with a stubby cedar hovering over the sienna steps and a small porch. It was once the dental office of Dr. Hayling's. Now, it was the ACCORD Civil Rights Museum.

In 1964, it was there that Dr. Hayling put out the initial call for college students across the country to spend their spring break in St. Augustine and participate in demonstrations. Hayling hoped to attract enough people to St. Augustine that the demonstrations would garner national attention. (It worked.)

Everywhere in Lincolnville there was a story about MLK, Dr. Hayling, Ralph Abernathy or Andrew Young — who became the most celebrated organizers of the movement locally. Young went on to become a national icon as the executive director of the SCLC, then

became the United States' ambassador to the United Nations and later Atlanta's mayor. But in St. Augustine, Young is remembered for his unrelenting persistence.

When a group of protesters set off from Lincolnville up to King Street, past the Flagler hotel, toward the Plaza de la Constitución in 1964, they were met by counter-protesters and police at the corner of St. George Street and the Plaza's edge. The line between law enforcement and white supremacists was at times indistinguishable.

There, Young led the crowd across the street and was met with balled fists. He was pummeled to the ground, kicked, and repeatedly bludgeoned. When the agitators let up, Young picked himself up without a hint of antagonism, carefully composed himself and made another attempt to lead the march into the Plaza. Again, he was struck down. Again, he stood back up, collected himself, and then finally, the white agitators let the crowd onto the plaza.

When I retraced the demonstrators' footsteps last year from Lincolnville to the Plaza, a group took selfies in front of Flagler where a statue of its namesake stands resolute, his knee bent in contrapposto, his hand tucked in his right pocket of his pants, and his stare set on Lincolnville. Slowly floating down the street, a large, white pick-up truck moved past with a confederate battle flag positioned in its bed along with a Trump campaign sticker.

I heard blues pouring out of bars, the purr of motorcycles, and smelled the perfume of rum and sunscreen. The thing that moved me most on that walk laid at the edge of the Plaza — where Young persevered. A walkway of coquina segments interspersed with bronze cast footsteps of Andrew Young and granite bars inscribed with quotes from MLK, President Johnson and Young cut across the park. They named it "Andrew Young Crossing."

One quote by Young read, "This is your story as much if not more than it is my story."

In 2012, the City hired the Strategic Planning Group of Ponte Vedra Beach as a consultant to asses Lincolnville and propose a Community Redevelopment Area Plan (CRA) by 2013. The resulting CRA cited the "inadequate" street layout and lot sizes as well as unsafe and unsanitary conditions that allegedly endangered life. The code violations were so densely concentrated in Lincolnville that they exceeded the number of code violations for the entire remainder of the city. In 2017, the City then hired Strategic Planning Group again to revisit and amend the CRA making a final proposal to redevelop the area. In Nolan's view, "The whole idea was that everything here was dispensable." His normally soft, honeyed voice rose a few decibels and turned sharp when pressed about the plan. "There's a lot of sneakiness that goes on. It's shameful."

During an earlier look at Lincolnville, the University of Florida prepared a plan to redevelop the area. Two professors, Ruth Steiner and Kristin Larsen, asked for Nolan's opinion. They also showed him a list of sources they planned to speak with. He laughed when he explained that the list included people that would like nothing more than to see Lincolnville bull-dozed and turned into a string of vacation rentals and storefronts. "It struck me immediately," he remembered. One listed name was a former City Manager, Joseph Pomar, who Nolan said would prefer to line up half-a-dozen bulldozers and raze the place, because it'd be better off as a parking lot for the Quarter.

In 39 pages, the CRA proposed a 12-month plan to establish a Trust Fund to continue to buy buildings the City deemed "blighted." There were some positive takeaways, like the note that short-term rentals were negatively affecting the neighborhood, but what they deemed historic seemed off according to a map included therein. When I asked Nolan to help me parse the document, that mischievous grin and deep bellied guffaw returned.

Page 7 caught his eye. It outlined the "Lincolnville Historic District," but the outlined shape seemed wrong. He had come to know the amorphous blob that corralled Lincolnville quite well over the past 30 years, and he immediately pointed out that Dr. Hayling's office was not included in the shape, which is now the ACCORD Museum. The

oldest church in Lincolnville, St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church, was also excluded. The remainder of the Buena Esperanza plantation home was absent. St. Mary's Baptist Church, too. He could go on and on and on, but doing so nauseated him.

If a building failed to fit inside the outline in this plan, then it allowed developers, new home-owners, or the City — depending on who owned the land — to demolish the site or alter it to the point of erasure. It also prevented these properties from a treasure trove of state grants aimed at historic preservation, because they weren't deemed "historic."

Nolan rhetorically asked in an email, "Is it ineptitude or racism? Given my experience, I would say both."

"We're in a stage of denial," Nolan said. To build on this point, the former slave market, now the pavilion at the East end of the Plaza, is known as the former flower market by the same milieu of locals. It's a past that some simply don't want to remember. But Nolan is set on not letting them forget.

In his convincing baritone he said, "I want St. Augustine to tell the whole story."

Reverend Ron Rawls of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in 1873 in Lincolnville

Michael Adno

The Reverend

With a light rain coming down, Reverend Rawls of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal and I walked under umbrellas onto the main artery of Lincolnville, Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue.

The Reverend — clean-cut in a checked suit and black bowtie, with soft eyes and a bald head — explained that many people knew his church because of its involvement in the Civil Rights movement, citing the presence of MLK and Ralph Abernathy. But Rawls recounted the church's founding back in 1873, at its original location toward the southern edge of Lincolnville. In 1904, it moved to its "new" location, off what was then called Central Avenue.

Rawls noted that while it figured large as a historic site during the Civil Rights era, he saw its foremost significance as a church founded by freed slaves. "It provided a safe-haven," he said. "It was a place where people could establish a life for themselves."

In his ten-years at St. Paul, he has watched the neighborhood change, both from within his congregation and on the street-level. For a long time, nobody paid much mind to Lincolnville's blemishes — homes that had not received much care or forlorn lots that were scattered throughout the place. But as St. Augustine grew and the downtown area boomed, Lincolnville became prime real-estate. The slow expanse of the City's tourism industry started making its way South, and then, suddenly, it seemed like people outside the neighborhood cared.

Speculation of what Lincolnville could become has loomed for decades, but in recent years, the promise of this peninsula as the next "thing" has taken root. Gentrification arrived, and the quiet yet violent forces built up over the area like a summer squall. The image of bulldozers that David Nolan had posited were not a wild exaggeration. They were a reality — if a bit more gradual. The displacement in Lincolnville is not readily visible; it has taken place over decades, house by house, block by block, family by family; but it has been acutely felt.

For many pushed up against the wall in Lincolnville, the lack of public programs and resources aimed at helping low-income residents hold onto their properties were seen as a direct corollary to allowing property taxes push people out of their homes. Code enforcement became suffocatingly stringent and ballooning real-estate crippled homeowners. Rawls put it most clearly, “People are losing houses because of taxes.”

As both private and public investments are made in the neighborhood, property values increase and, in turn, the cost of property taxes follows suit. For some long-term residents and heirs who have been here before Lincolnville was even a twinkle in any entrepreneur’s eye, the recent wave of tax hikes have priced them out.

Many homes in Lincolnville are passed down through generations. With the cost to keep a home in Lincolnville rising steadily, some heirs are forced to make difficult decisions as to what to do with the inherited property. If a home has fallen out of code or is in need of repairs, the problem is even more urgent. “Not everyone has $80,000 in the bank,” Rawls said. Often, these families succumb to the pressure of relentless code enforcement by selling off the house to escape the debt that could otherwise take both the house they’ve inherited and their financial security.

As we walked the neighborhood, Rawls would point to a house, tell a story about the former owners, how they lost it, and what the new owners decided to do. He has watched it happen countless times. Some homes have been rehabbed. Some were razed and rebuilt. Some were modest renovations. Some were multi-million dollar homes. And this was where the rising property taxes came into the fray. Rawls, who is also a licensed but non-practicing realtor, pointed to one home estimated to be worth $500,000. Then he showed me the small home directly behind, which belonged to members of his congregation. “It’s good if you’re trying to sell your home,” he said, “But if you’re trying to stay there, your taxes go up, and you didn’t necessarily ask for that.”

Rawls didn't believe the neighborhood was a priority for the City prior to gentrification, but he countered that for the slim remainder of black residents still there, gentrification has brought storm drains, adequate sewer lines and even sidewalks. Maybe food and grocery would follow, too, because other than an upscale farm stand, a recently opened breakfast diner/luncheonette, and a small general store, the neighborhood had no place to buy groceries — especially at tenable cost.

In 2007, when Rawls first took his post in St. Augustine, he remembered a corner store up the street where men used to hang out. "They weren't doing everything on the up and up," he said, and residents started to complain, particularly the newcomers. "What you saw when you came into the neighborhood were a bunch of black folk hanging out on the corner outside the store," he said. "They got that fixed up pretty quick."

"In black neighborhoods, people like hanging out. That's the culture," Rawls told me. He pointed to a cedar tree outside a boarded up house where ten years ago, you would see people taking refuge in the shade. Now, those hangouts have disappeared. "You don't see it anymore," he told me. "Those are the things they don't want to see."

"The reality is that the place belongs to different people," he added in a somber tone. "We're trying to do things to slow down the process, but we can't stop it." As to talking with the city about the effect gentrification has had on Lincolnville, he said, "They still miss it."

"They call me everything but a preacher," Rawls mused of the City and added, "My skin color diminishes my voice in City Hall." And to be fair, many people on all sides of this story had both criticisms and commendations for the Reverend. Around town, you could find bumper stickers depicting Rawls with devil horns, but residents of Lincolnville saw him as both a failure and savior, sometimes too self-interested to see the bigger picture. And many made sure to note that Rawls did not live in St. Augustine but in Gainesville — 75 miles further west.

When it came to honoring the African American community, Rawls echoed Nolan's sentiment — it was like pulling teeth to get anything done. "That's life here in St. Augustine. It is what it is," he said, laughing.

Of the new faces in Lincolnville though, Rawls told me that their thought pattern was a bit different than the vanguard, and he saw that as promising. That entrenched network of good-ole' boys and times not forgotten may change with a new order. The question would remain who the change would serve.

Walking back up MLK together, I recognized a flyer on the ground, and showed it to Rawls. It was a corporate real-estate firm's door-knob query aimed at the fire-sale of homes. He looked it over and mused, "Offer them some quarters for their home and hope they jump."

Further up the road, we peered over a tall hedge, and Rawls greeted a guy tending to a garden as "Boss Man." They quickly caught up and Rawls told him, "If you need to come talk to me, come talk to me. I don't want you to lose that," as he looked up towards the two-story Victorian home.

Boss Man replied, "I ain't trying to lose it."

"If you see stuff getting out of hand, come talk to me."

"Well, it's a little out of hand, but we'll talk."

Rawls gave me the backstory: The owner was inundated with back taxes for five months now, but he hadn't come to see Rawls yet. The homeowner had been pouring money into maintaining and keeping the house up to code, and now the lien placed on his home by the City had become insurmountable.

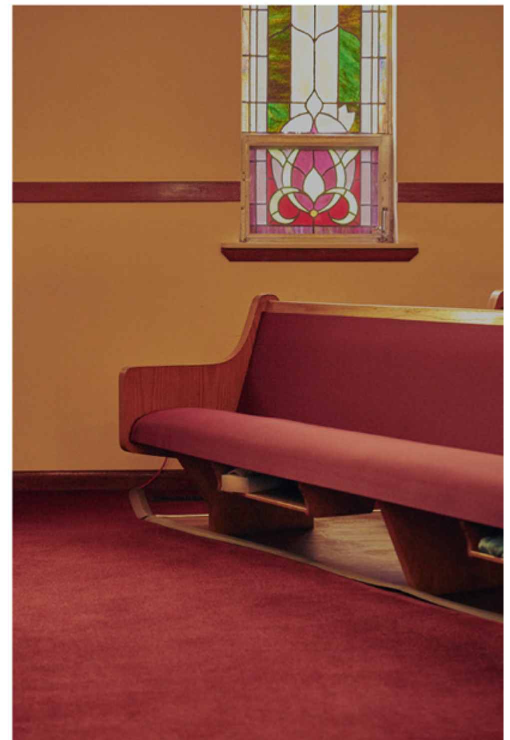
Just across the street, Rawls pointed out the home of the Jenkins, who "were pillars in this community." Now, since the family had passed on and the heirs were living elsewhere, he wasn't sure what would happen to the property. "Everybody has the right to sell," he

offered, but he made a distinction between the natural process of attrition as compared to the systemic pressures propagated by the city — under questionably nefarious intention.

It seemed clear that there was a lien on Lincolnville, and the longtime residents felt like their heritage was up for sale.

Church bells rang overhead as we said our goodbyes, and the weather broke for a moment. We set down our umbrellas, and Rawls told me why he hadn't given up on the town. "As strong as that spirit is in St. Augustine," he said, referring to the movement to reframe Lincolnville as something shiny and new, "there is another spirit here that speaks of our ancestors and our rich history."

"I hear those voices, too," he said.



Rev Rawls' office and the Church's sanctuary

Michael Adno

Jay Ayres, a local builder who has lived in Lincolnville for the past 13 years

Michael Adno

The Builder

"We never went south of King Street," Jay Ayres said. His parents owned property near the beach in St. Augustine, so, periodically during his childhood, they'd visited town.

He spent his childhood romps in and around the city — the beaches, the fort, the historic district. Never Lincolnville. In college, Ayres transferred to Flagler. He arrived in 2005, and he found a rental in Lincolnville — his first venture south of King. Post-college, he stuck around. He's now a builder in town, and he built his own home in Lincolnville. He's lived in the neighborhood for the past 13 years.

When Ayres first lived in Lincolnville, he said some people didn't feel comfortable south of King street. It was still a Southern town, segregated, and a place where a kind of caste system was still in effect. Lincolnville was deemed gritty, for better or worse. He missed that.

"A lot of homes have come down," he said.

In college, Ayres started waited tables at a haunt on the water, but when he was back home he worked under a carpenter and interior designer. During term, as he walked to school from his place on Sanford Street, cutting up to Cedar, then following MLK to the edge of campus, he usually saw a builder, Chad Smith, plugging away at a home. One morning, he introduced himself, asked if Smith needed any help, and soon enough, he'd was clad in a tool belt rather than an apron.

After Ayres graduated in 2007, he sought the proper licensing to work under Smith and took to it full time. Smith, who'd been in town since 1989, introduced Ayres to some of the fixtures in Lincolnville, and as he put it they "started to build back there a lot more."

Ayres worked under Smith until 2015, when he went out on his own. When we spoke in April 2018, Ayres was finishing up a house he was building for his wife and himself — his second personal project in

Lincolnville. To date, he has laid hands on more than 30 projects south of King Street with 15 custom builds from the ground up.

When he bought his first slim parcel off Pomar Street and finished the design for the house, he went to ask his neighbor across the street what he thought. The neighbor didn't pay no mind to the drawing. He just looked at Ayres and said, "I don't care what you do on your property. What do you do on your land is what you do. What I do on mine is what I do."

As long as one didn't impinge on the other, they'd be good. Down here, the rights of the property owner were paramount. Whether they could afford or prefer a chain-link fence to a picket fence was their decision, not up to some deed restriction. "That's something about the community I don't want to lose," Ayres said.

For the newcomers, Ayres offered a bit of advice: "Just because you overpaid for your house doesn't mean the community owes you anything." People enter the wrong when they expect that the updates and renovations they make to their own home should spill over to the adjacent property. "That's not the way Lincolnville works," he said.

As the real-estate bubble has expanded and subsequently pushed the cost of rentals up, and as homeowners aim to meet their mortgage payments, Ayres believes it has hurt the community. When he first moved to town over a decade ago, almost all the rentals belonged to students or people in the service industry. Now, those types of renters can't afford to live in Lincolnville.

The projects Ayres works on he feels suit the neighborhood. He never builds the same house twice. He tries to build homes in step with what came before, homes that fit the street, the lot and most of all the market. He places emphasis on the responsibility of builders in Lincolnville, parsing the intricacies of porch overhangs and materials, even acknowledging the threat sea-level rise poses.

But as to the City's role, Ayres made an adept point with the housing market. He suggested that from a fiscal perspective, it wasn't in their interest to intervene. The City was suffering from a lack of tax

revenue, facing increasing difficulty with the effects of climate change, looking to overhaul the waste water treatment plant, and other infrastructure projects. With that in mind, the rising costs of property taxes coupled with real-estate in Lincolnville generated more revenue for the City. Why would they crimp down on that stream of cash?

In the same breath, he diplomatically ran through the CRA's Steering Committee, the City's programs aimed at assisting homeowners, and both the good and the bad with the influx of short-term rentals in the neighborhood. And he did so humbly, with probity. "That's a hard one to figure out, especially for the City," he added.

When I asked Ayres what his hopes for the community were, he listed the new businesses in Lincolnville, the waves of development he'd seen in 13 years, the bulkhead he helped build to protect the neighborhood from flooding, and while he was thankful for all of it, he did acknowledge, "The type of people who can afford a home for $3, $4, $500,000 are not the original salt of Lincolnville."

He admitted it was a broad brush to describe the demographic there that hemmed people in, but at its core, he hoped that the place would retain its roots, that respect was paid to its history, that the hardships people endured were celebrated. He wanted people to know what made Lincolnville, Lincolnville.

Chewing on the thought carefully, Ayres said, "I just hope that people respect the community." He paused. "Don't move there to change it. It changes you."

Nancy Shaver, St. Augustine's mayor who won reelection for her third term this Fall

Michael Adno

The Mayor

With a warm cast of a sodium street-light pouring down on us, Nancy Shaver, the Mayor of St. Augustine, told me, “You do weird things when you know you only have six months with someone you love.”

Shaver, who is serving her second term as mayor, isn’t from St. Augustine. She is — as we Floridians say — a Yankee, but her relaxed nature betrays her roots north of the Mason-Dixon. When her husband became terminally ill, they started looking for a place to spend their remaining days together. A friend recommended St. Augustine as a place they’d like, and Shaver started poking around online and came across a place in Lincolnville. In 2009, she and her husband bought their house sight-unseen.

Later, in the wake of her husband’s death, she turned attention to the city and became increasingly involved in the community. In 2014, she ran for mayor as an outsider with slim odds. As one person mused, “She’s from up North. Say no more!” While she had no political experience, she had a 30-year career in business, running a Fortune 500 corporation and 3 startups. She won by a margin of just 100 votes against incumbent Mayor, Joe Boles, and won reelection again in 2016.

I asked her about Lincolnville. After all, this was where she has lived for the past nine years. She listed myriad programs aimed at helping residents who were threatened with losing their homes, like the Fix-It-Up program for minor repairs up to $7,000 or the Emergency Assistance Grants available, but she felt that people didn’t trust the programs nor the people involved. Plus, she felt that the city couldn’t intervene in market forces that drive real-estate values. She likened that approach to social engineering, which she wasn’t fond of.

Still, I asked her if the city could bolster growth and at the same time protect the people who live there, ensure that longtime residents could keep their homes — especially in Lincolnville where people were most vulnerable. The issue can become impenetrably complex with all the moving parts, including but not limited to: multiple heirs

to properties, the lack of homestead exemptions in Lincolnville, and mistrust between residents and city officials. She hoped to try and mend whatever semblance of trust was left, work towards more affordable housing in town, and look at other city's municipal programs that had kept residents in their homes, such as Atlanta's "Anti-Displacement Tax Fund Program," that covers property tax increases for qualified homeowners.

After splitting hairs on a century's misgivings, she pulled back, paused, and stared off onto West King Street. And as if she were being pulled between the contingencies of protection and growth, she answered my question with, "I'm not sure that's possible."

She paused a little longer and added, "I don't know the answer."

Earlier, Shaver had said, "If you want to find racism, look at infrastructure." She was referencing things like the lack of storm drains in Lincolnville in years past and the medieval sewage system in West St. Augustine. "We need help, and we're not getting it," Shaver said. She noted that the city's sewage system needed to be overhauled and would cost $6 million, which made up more than 10% of the entire city budget. Moreover, because of the way the city limits were drawn among municipalities in St. Johns County, West St. Augustine fell outside of the City's purview and into some purgatory that belonged to the County. Needless to say, proper action was untenable without state appropriations.

On my visits, I stayed on the edge of town where city limits spill into St. Johns County indiscernibly. I spent mornings and afternoons running through West St. Augustine. Back there, along the narrow ribbons of asphalt flanked by trailers and shotgun shacks, you step back in time. The colonial and Victorian vernacular across U.S. 1 falls away, and you're transported to old Florida — the Florida I was familiar with, the one that conjures up True Detective's grotesque gothic ruin porn (a favorite reference for those unfamiliar with the South). In West St. Augustine, almost all the homes have a big lump of land on their property where septic tanks are buried. And due to a lack of maintenance and mitigation against pollutants like nitrate, the tanks have become a looming health concern.

Like the City did in Lincolnville, St. Johns County funded a CRA study for West St. Augustine in 2010 in hopes of adressing the outdated sewage system, but eight years later, the problem still plagues the area. The main barricade here is that residents would be left to foot the bill in transitioning from a private septic tank to the City's sewers, along with all the tanks removals. As of 2016, 20% of St. Augustine lived below the poverty line, while St. Johns County was one of the most affluent counties in Florida due to the concentration of wealth along the coast.

Walter Coker (https://indoek.com/article/surf-shacks-060-walter-coker/), a veteran photojournalist for Folio Weekly, who lived in West St. Augustine and reported there throughout the 90s and early-aughts said that there hadn't been much change at all in the past three decades — barring the slow creep of business along West King Street that bisects West St. Augustine. In 1990, when Coker's home was burglarized on Christmas Eve, the responding officer asked Coker rhetorically what the hell he expected living out there, implying that having all their belongings stolen and their holiday foiled was par for the course.

In Jeremy Dean's documentary about St. Augustine's part in the Civil Rights Movement, "Dare Not Walk Alone," David Nolan explained that West King was and remains the most apt option for an interchange off Interstate 95. This decision would in theory transform the moribund sequence of buildings along the road into a bustling thoroughfare — but developers chose alternate routes when interchanges were planned in the 1960s, effectively avoiding the predominantly black neighborhood. Some cited this as backlash for the demonstrations in the 1960s, but the timelines of construction, easement permits and the dearth of records that could support this theory are thin at best. Still, though it was unlikely the demonstrations tipped this off, the sentiment is not far-fetched.

As with much of the past in St. Augustine, the lines of gray in West St. Augustine only deepen with each bend in the road. Is it the specter of segregation, deep-seated racism, and a long history of inequality that haunts this place? Would the pall of dark "spirits" always hang over this town? The mysteries here conjure up images of palmetto bundles

stretching deep into the swamp, falling off into dark water punctuated by cypress knees, unsure of what lurks beneath the surface.

Nyk Smith, widely known as "The Beet Queen"

Michael Adno

The Beet Queen

During my first visit to Lincolnville, there was a store that caught my eye. In varying typefaces and scale, the sign's letters read: Corner Market. On my first tour of the neighborhood, Sandra Parks, a local educator and activist who was married to Stetson Kennedy, took me past the store.

Her words turned bright when she mentioned the owner, "The Beet Queen." The same happened with David Nolan when he passed the store. The owner had catered his wedding. Considering there were no other businesses in Lincolnville proper besides one recently opened restaurant, The Blue Hen, I decided to talk to the Beet Queen.

The next day I walked into the store hoping to find her. Along one wall was a shelf filled with different jams and chutneys, honeys and relishes — all made from beets in one form or another. Throughout the rest of the store, there were more food stuffs, books, and clothes. The place is prepossessing and down-home. It appears true to its roots. Preceded by some faint rustling in a back room, Nyk Smith, the Beet Queen, came rifling to the front, her hands full. I asked if she'd be willing to take me around the neighborhood, and while she was rightfully weary, she told me to call her on Sunday.

Late in the afternoon, just outside one of the Buena Esperanza Plantation's last vestiges — a former slave cabin — I met Smith. She explained that her son, Kris Smith, restored the cabin, finishing the wood, furnishing all the plugs, and subcontracting a friend to forge the latches and bolts. She was proud that her family had been involved in the project and proud that the cabin was part of the Freedom Trail.

Pointing to a narrow street behind us, she said, "That right there used to be entirely coquina." Two little girls on scooters made concentric circles as we started walking the neighborhood.

Smith's father worked at the School for the Deaf and Blind — the same school Ray Charles attended — teaching blind students to work with tools as sighted people. Growing up in St. Augustine (born in Lincolnville but living in North City near the school until she was 3 and then moving to Lincolnville where she and her parents still live), she remembers a segregated YMCA where she and her sister were dropped in the pool while their mother made sure nobody laid a hand on them. "They didn't touch us, and we swam," she recalled.

Times have changed, in some ways. We walked down to Robert B. Hayling Park, where young families glowed when they saw Smith. Folks waved from stoops. Even if people didn't know each other's names, they still said hello. As Smith said of Lincolnville, "nobody was a stranger."

With the influx of new faces, though, some of that warmth has chilled. Smith's smile can dress up a room, yet her greetings are sometimes met with a tepid hello.

Smith told me how a family that had started their family here was considering moving away. She joked, "Keep in touch, because I might be moving, too!"

Smith had moved before. She lived in Orlando for fourteen years, before feeling the pull of home. She returned in 2013. That homecoming, she found everything polished downtown, but in Lincolnville, the improvements were hit or miss. The patchwork of new, sterile homes alongside remnants of the old neighborhood as compared to the historic district were a testament to the City's priorities in her mind. "This is just as important. Our tax dollars are just as important," Smith said.

For Smith, the change stirred something in her. She'd been trying to pry stories from her parents — stories of the Civil Rights era, of Lincolnville post desegregation — because she felt that those might be lost as Lincolnville changed. She remembered the time their neighbor's home was charred by Molotov cocktails in North City. Her mom liked to talk, but her Dad wasn't as forthcoming. Still, Smith felt the stories they had inside needed to be told because, "When the

older generation passes away. The real truth will be gone." She was set on finding a home for those stories with ACCORD, with the Lincolnville Museum, and even in her own store. She hoped the town would someday celebrate its past — Lincolnville's too.

The French author, Patrick Chamoiseau, once said, "You can't go to a library and find out what really happened in Martinique. You have to go to the oral tradition. For the people who were dominated, there is no history, no past. These people don't have a voice. The Europeans tell our story. So, you have to go the storyteller."

In step, Smith warned of the "other truth" — the truth derived from a history bound by the limits of colonial knowledge. I assumed this meant the one they were dressing up in costumes down by the waterfront — the one with handsome explorers and sunken treasure. She asked how anyone could trust the purported history and alleged truth some tell, especially in the African-American community. "How could we?" she said, rhetorically.

Heading back to her store along MLK Avenue, I asked what she'd like to see in the next generation of residents. She hoped that they support the community, be considerate of changes that might affect their neighbors, and that, of course, they shop at the Corner Market. She broke into a laugh, then turned serious. She mentioned the Lincolnville and ACCORD museums before reciting the proverb, "Charity starts at home and then spreads abroad."

Outside the Corner Market, we watched the sky turn from orange to blue as the sun sank behind the ancient trees in Lincolnville, cutting through the tendrils of moss that had watched the landscape shift over centuries. Smith ran through the history of the building. It was the library before desegregation, and her son had turned it into a storefront and gallery space nearly a decade ago. Then she spoke of her plans for the year ahead. Looking at two paint swatches on the columns, we talked beet sugar and poetic purple, what shade she'd choose for the trim. She spoke of bringing in more perishables — essentials the community needed — and cleaning up the backyard.

While she noted that an unprecedented amount of change had occurred here in the past 50 years, it was inevitable that more would come. The question that remained to be seen was — what change and for whom; what would remain hidden and what would be remembered.

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Michael Adno

Michael is a writer and photographer born in Florida as a first-generation American to Austrian and South African parents. His work has appeared in The New York Times, The Bitter Southerner, and The Surfer's Journal among other magazines.

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