My thesis is #MappingFreedom - digitally documenting and interactively mapping all of the freedom colonies along the Western colonial pathways, as an effort for preservation, conservation, restoration and edu-tourism. Freedom colonies are the communities of people who immediately resisted Western colonialism, creating their own “safe spaces” to protect themselves from terrorism such as the resulting indigenous genocide, The Atlantic Slave Trade, plantation slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow and other racialized human rights abuses. These places exist throughout the planet to this day, but because of our history, are endangered, and at risk of being lost due to migration, and other factors such as the failure of urban planning and gentrification to see the value in these sites.

For my research I focused on Shankleville in Shankleville, TX - of which I’m a direct descendant of the founders, and keynoted the 150th anniversary celebration in 2017- the Raramuri, called the Tarahumara by the Spanish, and known as “those who run fast” in their native tongue, located in the Copper Canyons of the Sierra Madre mountain range in Northern Mexico, Weeksville, in the Bed-Stuy and Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY, and Nicodemus in Nicodemus, Kansas.
Throughout the latter 17th century, the maroon societies disrupted the system of institutionalized slavery by razing English settlements and creating treaties that though imperfect, demanded an end to the hostility between English colonists and Maroons, and granted the Maroons freedom from slavery and access to land.

1. **San Basilio de Palenque (or Palenque de San Basilio)**
2. **5,000 in US**
   a. 558+ in Texas
   b. with the first being founded in 1738, Ft. Mose, Florida.
3. **Western colonial circuit**
   a. Palenques in Colombia
   b. Quilombos/Mocambos in Brazil
   c. Maroons in Jamaica and the rest of Latin Americas and the Caribbean
   d. “Freedom country” Haiti
   e. "Freedmen settlements" throughout North America, Australia, Africa and Asia.

These communities formed immediately upon the onslaught of Western colonialism. One of the earlier communities include San Basilio de Palenque in what is now called Colombia. As soon as the slave ships pulled into the port at Cartagena, the enslaved Africans mutinied and jumped ship, running to the hills. And with the indigenous communities fleeing genocide, created fortified communities called palenques where they not only fiercely protected their freedom, but attempted to free the enslaved that were brought into port, and were quite successful in doing so, to such a point the Spanish Crown issued a Royal Decree establishing them as a “Free Colony” in 1691. There are numerous other such communities and their stories, with an estimated 5,000 in the US alone, with the first known freedom colony being founded in what is now Florida, at Fort Mose, back when it was a Spanish territory. They are quilombos and mocambos in Brazil, Maroons in Jamaica and all throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and up and the the coasts of the Atlantic Seaboard, like the Gullah-Geechee and the Sea Islands. Haiti is a freedom country, and “freedmen settlements" exist throughout North America, Africa, Asia and Australia - anywhere Western colonialism went. This is the first time ever that any scholar has conducted research tying these communities together as an international resistance to colonialism and Western human rights abuses.
“So compelling to historians has been this dark image of the degradation of landless blacks, of the rise of sharecropping, debt slavery, the neo-plantation, and Jim Crow apartheid,” *that they often failed to notice a counter-movement*. Focused as they were on the triumph of sharecropping and the accompanying degradation of blacks in the Deep South, *historians neglected the counter-current of black landowner settlements*. Numbers are difficult to estimate, but this ubiquitous, unremarked internal exodus to local *freedom colonies must have dwarfed the famous move north.*”-Conrad and Sitton in *Texas Freedom Colonies* (2005)

Although this phenomenon was mostly hidden from mainstream knowledge, there was a book written on the phenomenon of the Texas Freedom Colonies in 2005, by Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad. They were taken aback at how little scholarship and media coverage there were on these communities and concluded that: “*So compelling to historians has been this dark image of the degradation of landless blacks of the rise of sharecropping, debt slavery, the neo-plantation, and Jim Crow apartheid*” *that they often failed to notice a counter-movement*. Focused as they were on the triumph of sharecropping and the accompanying degradation of blacks in the Deep South, historians neglected the counter-current of black landowner settlements. Numbers are difficult to estimate, but this ubiquitous, unremarked internal exodus to local *freedom colonies must have dwarfed the famous move north*. No account of them had appeared in the Journal of Southern History by 2003. Likewise, the scholarly journal of the Texas State Historical Association, the Southwestern Historical Quarterly, still had not published a single article about black landowner communities by 2003, although the association’s six-volume reference work, the New Handbook of Texas, listed over two hundred such places.”

In response, Texas A&M professor Dr. Andrea Roberts has launched the Texas Freedom Colonies Project, where’s she’s found over 580 of these communities to have existed. In a recent interview for Next City, she underscored another reason why these communities hid themselves for so long: “*Courthouses were a little bit dangerous to show up at in 1890 and declare ‘hi, I’m an African-American and I own all this land.’*” For obvious reasons.
1. The International Association of Freedom Colonies (iAFC) public-private partnership initiative
   1. Preservation
   2. Conservation
   3. Restoration
   4. Edu-tourism
   5. iAFC Oral History Archives
   6. Interactive Map
   7. Crowd sourced Wikipedia Database
   8. UNESCO World Heritage “Freedom Colonies” Trail

Endangered & at-risk due to neglect, historical discrimination, and on-going disenfranchisement, these communities hold unfathomable volumes of valuable history, just waiting to be uncovered, preserved and shared with the world, while engaging in preservation, conservation and restoration efforts. As Columbia’s first ever Wikipedia Fellow and Wikimedian-In-Residence, I’m founding the International Association of Freedom Colonies (iAFC) and its iAFC Oral History Archives serve as a public-private partnership initiative to aid in preservation, conservation, restoration and edu-tourism efforts of these communities. (For example, Weeksville JUST announced a funding crisis where a 250K gap threatens to shut its doors as early as in a few weeks.) With the interactive map and the crowd sourced drafts at Wikipedia, we’ll be able to share this history with the world in numerous ways, hopefully as an UNESCO World Heritage “Freedom Colonies” Trail where each place is placed on an international trail. I was fortunate to interview Nicodemus Kansas descendant Erika Lively, who explores her great-grandmother’s journey in leaving one freedom colony, to help found another over 500 miles away in Colorado. Click on her name to hear a minute of that interview.