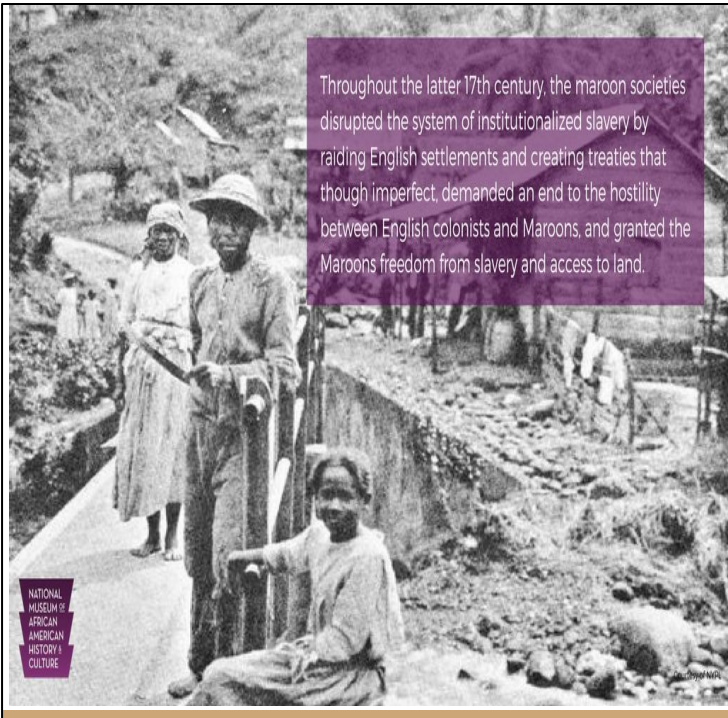




My thesis is #MappingFreedom - digitally documenting and interactively mapping all of the freedom colonies along the Western colonial pathways, as an effort for preservation, conservation, restoration and edu-tourism. Freedom colonies are the communities of people who immediately resisted Western colonialism, 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.



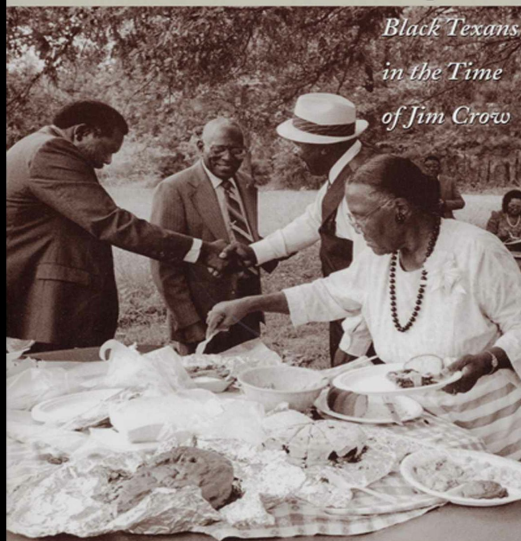
1. **San Basilio de Palenque (or Palenque de San Basilio)**
2. **5,000 in US**
  - a. **558+ in Texas**
  - b. with the first being founded in 1738, **Ft. Mose, Florida.**
3. **Western colonial circuit**
  - a. **Palenques** in Colombia
  - b. **Quilombos/Mocambos** in Brazil
  - c. **Maroons** in Jamaica 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 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)

## **FREEDOM** **Colonies** *Independent*

*Black Texans  
in the Time  
of Jim Crow*



THAD SITTON and JAMES H. CONRAD  
*With research assistance and photographs by Richard Orton*

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.”**

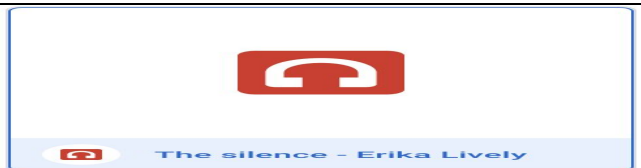
In response, Texas A&M professor Dr. Andrea Roberts has launched the Texas Freedom Colonies Project, where’s she’s found over 580 of these communities to have existed. In a recent interview for Next City, she underscored another reason why these communities hid themselves for so long: **“Courthouses 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



**Oral history clip of Erika Lively, a descendant of Nicodemus, KS and The Dry, CO, who created “Lost Ghosts of the Dry,” an art exhibit about her ancestors’ journeys and lives in these two midwest freedom colonies, on the silences, “disappearances” and erasure of these places and their stories, and the “single narrative” that exists of people branded “not-white.” Her great-grandmother conducted interviews of Nicodemus for the local newspaper, the Nicodemus Cyclone, and left a 500 page tome of work that Erika is now using to disrupt that silence.**

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.