

# Census Data and Property Records

## An Alternative Archaeology of Rosewood

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I began researching the tragic history of Rosewood, Florida in the spring of 2005 as a side project. Initially, I felt the inability to conduct conventional archaeological research at the site hindered its potential to provide me with a suitable PhD research topic. This self-serving perspective gave way as I realized I could create a rich project drawing on the traditional historical methods of archaeology, new media and digital technologies, and engaged visual anthropology. Today, I refer to my work with Rosewood as engaged visual archaeology and it forms the basis of my PhD.

### The 1923 Rosewood Race Riot

Practically nothing remains of the prosperous, majority-black town of Rosewood located in the fertile Great Gulf Hammock of North Florida, once home to a bustling agricultural community that grew cotton, grain, citrus and all manner of vegetables. By the 1920s, the neighboring town of Sumner began to eclipse Rosewood in economic importance due to a large sawmill recently opened there. Sumner was a company town where few workers owned their own property, and spatial segregation between its black and white populations was severe. These two communities maintained relatively peaceful relations for years. Then, on New Year's Day 1923, a white woman in Sumner fabricated a black assailant to hide her extramarital affair and that tentative peace was shattered forever.

Following the accusation, a white mob quickly headed for Rosewood and encountered the home of Sam Carter. At first, the mob interrogated Carter by hanging him from a tree by the neck, and when it seemed they might release him, a man leveled his gun at Carter's face and New Year's Day ended with the sound of a shotgun blast. Rumor and hatred spread quickly through rural Florida, eventually reaching the Ku Klux Klan in Gainesville, only forty miles away. By the sixth of January three other black resi-

Whereas modern historical archaeology consistently investigates issues of identity and economic position, only a handful of scholars attempt to combine such perspectives into a cohesive whole. The specific application of intersectional analysis in historical archaeology remains a difficult task for obvious reasons. The challenge, of course, is to accurately "map" these various axes of identity and inequality as lived experiences—a challenge compounded for the archaeologist.

The apparent solution requires a combination of complementary data, but which datasets should be used and how? Because my research with Rosewood centers on commemorating the



Rosewood survivor Robie Morton (born 1915) and the author in Miami, 2009. Photo courtesy Diana González-Tennant

community and not solely the tragic events of early 1923, a diachronic analysis of race, class, kinship and gender in regard to property ownership and space requires a new methodology. I begin with geographic information systems (GIS) and historical property records. This involves re-creating historical property boundaries through time in the GIS. This time-series data gives a clear picture of property ownership and answers the questions: Who owned what? When did they buy it? How much did they pay for it? When did they sell it? How much did they get? Were the prices fair for the day?

Property records alone rarely provide detailed information about race, kinship and so forth. As I populate the historic property GIS with data, census records provide much of the additional information making a historic intersectionality

analysis possible. Although other places in the US must deal with a twenty year gap in census data, the Florida state censuses of 1885 and 1895 allow the researcher to bridge this break. The addition of census data expands the questions above. Which jobs provided enough income to support home/property ownership? Did a black school teacher make the same as a white school teacher? Did children inherit land or buy their own? How was kinship expressed spatially on the landscape?

This methodology therefore involves the following steps: (1) identify the appropriate

historic property records, (2) translate the boundary information in the document into a GIS file, (3) identify the owner in the census, (4) add census data to the GIS record, and (5) analyze the relationships between complementary datasets contextually (and statistically if one likes). In the case of Rosewood, I've repeated these steps hundreds of times for a period beginning in 1860 and continuing to 1930. In this way, we have a diachronic dataset tracing the development and destruction of Rosewood's community—a dataset forming the first step in creating an engaged visual archaeology of redress.

### Engaging Contemporary Communities

The self-identified descendant community of Rosewood still commemorates the events of 1923, and more importantly their relationships to each other through time. The engaged visual anthropology aspect of this project involves working with this community. I have interviewed and continue to interview survivors, who are in their nineties, as well as work with advocate groups gathered around this story. Recently, I created a 25-minute video drawing on the above for use during educational bus tours organized by descendants and advocates to the area around Rosewood.

This video is the first in an eventual series combining history, anthropology and new media. Ultimately, all of the data gathered will inform the final stage of the project: the complete, virtual reconstruction of Rosewood and its environs. You can view the progress by visiting the Virtual Rosewood Research Site ([www.virtualrosewood.com](http://www.virtualrosewood.com)), which will host an interactive version of the re-created landscape. As the visitor moves from one place to another in this digital environment, the voices of survivors, descendants and kin will replace the narrator and discuss their connections to specific sites, structures and homes encountered in the virtual environment. The aim is to produce a collaborative and literally multi-vocal interpretation of Rosewood.

I consider the website, public talks and virtual tours as forms of truth-telling. Although this project centers on one place, tracing the experiences of the community through time directly intersects with important trends and moments in the broader history of race-based violence in the United States, as well as histories of segregation in residency patterns, economic transformation, and more. This work raises public awareness of ongoing, historically-conditioned social inequalities, and provides a set of techniques transplantable to other contexts—a new methodology aiding reparations activism with persuasive data for social justice work.

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### FIELD NOTES

dents had been murdered and the mob began the systematic burning of Rosewood. During this time a train came through town at four in the morning to pick up women and children, who had spent the previous couple of nights hiding in the swamps. The train took families to towns like Otter Creek, Archer and Gainesville's black district, where descendants live to this day.

### New Historical Methods

My academic interest in Rosewood seeks to combine the conventional questions of my discipline with emerging theoretical perspectives.