

Virtual Tour of Auburn University's African American History

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African American experiences are a rich part of Auburn University's history that is not freely told. Current campus tours do not include African American experiences that helped create the university as we know it today. This concern has motivated this research initiative to create a virtual tour of Auburn University that places a spotlight on these stories. It will be assumed that the corresponding author will represent the paper. The objective of this project is to highlight fourteen points of interest on Auburn's campus that hold African American significance.

Preparation for this project began during the Spring semester of 2022. Two undergraduate students in the College of Human Sciences at Auburn University, Courtney Weeks and Kalandra Blake served as Co-Directors for the research to Preserve African American Stories and Traditions (rPAAST) research group under the mentorship of Human Sciences Lecturer Dr. Robert Bubb. Seventh and eighth-grade students from Auburn Junior High School interested in participating in this research registered for a school club entitled "Friends of Baptist Hill." This name was inspired by the students' service work done at Auburn's first African American cemetery, Baptist Hill cemetery. Under the teaching and supervision of rPAAST co-directors, each student was responsible for researching one of the fourteen points highlighted in the virtual tour. For the final semester assignment, students invited their friends and family to walk the tour of Auburn's Campus and present their findings. The student's findings will be featured as summaries embedded in the virtual tour.

Fourteen points are featured on the virtual tour (Fig. 1). These points will highlight: Bessie Mae Holloway, Bo Jackson, Cam Newton, Harold A. Franklin, Harold Melton, John Reese, Josephus Bell, Josetta Brittain-Mat-

thews, and Thom Gossom. The final point will be the NPHC Legacy Plaza which is currently under construction. It is expected to be completed in September of 2022, and we will revisit the site then to update imaging.



Fig. 1. Junior High Students presenting their research on Auburn athlete, Bo Jackson.

The National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) is composed of nine African American Greek Organizations, also known as "the Divine 9". These organizations are Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Incorporated, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority incorporated, and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity incorporated.

Auburn University has a chapter for all nine organizations. Six of the nine NPHC organizations are active on

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campus as of Spring 2022. These organizations are Delta Sigma Theta (Kappa Upsilon chapter), Omega Psi Phi (Sigma Delta chapter), Alpha Phi Alpha (Omicron Kappa chapter), Phi Beta Sigma (Kappa Zeta chapter), Sigma Gamma Rho (Omicron Iota chapter), and Alpha Kappa Alpha (Kappa Chi chapter).

The NPHC Legacy Plaza will be located near the center of Auburn's main campus. Its goal is to "provide a space on campus that gives homage to the legacy of Black Greek Letter Organizations and African American culture at Auburn University (Greek Life, Auburn University)." It will feature nine markers to honor all organizations of the Divine 9. It is estimated to be completed in September 2022. We will complete this portion of the tour once the plaza is completed.

The Friends of Baptist Hill club for the Fall 2021 – Spring 2022 term was composed of twelve seventh and eighth graders attending Auburn Junior High School in Auburn, AL. Co-Directors from the research to Preserve African American Stories and Traditions program, Human Sciences students.

Courtney Weeks and Kalandra Blake, conducted research in the community to gather stories to teach to the students. Junior High students were given the opportunity to conduct their own research on their designated story. Students in this club were encouraged to take their knowledge outside of the classroom. Cemetery clean-up at Baptist Hill Cemetery was hosted by the club and supervised by the student Co-Directors. Students would spend hours of their weekend cleaning up the first African American cemetery in Auburn. Students also presented their work for the Fall 2021 semester at a presentation night for the Auburn community, where many of the people featured in the stories were present (Fig. 2). Reverend Willie Muse, who was the pastor of the first African American church was present for the student's presentation he did on him. Auburn's first African American firefighter, Jesse Strickland, and the wife of the first police officer, Estella Dunn, were also present for the student's presentations.

The Junior High students were encouraged to share their knowledge in an effort to spread awareness of Auburn's African American history. They also played a large role in creating this incredible resource to aid

this goal.



Fig. 2. Auburn Junior High Students and rPAAST co-director Courtney Weeks posing at one of the sites of their presentation.

Procedures

The first stage of planning this project occurred in the early Fall of 2021. We began by identifying the sites we wanted to explore and study. We did this by researching at the City Hall, speaking with community members, and conducting research using ancestry databases. We prepared fourteen stories to be studied and taught to Junior High Students at Auburn Junior High School. These students were given assignments and challenged with creating a creative piece to honor that story.

When selecting the story's place on campus, each space was selected by considering the significance of each spot. For example, John Reese does not have a marker on Auburn's downtown area. It is understood that he had a great impact on establishing Toomer's Drugs. Therefore, his spotlight will be placed at that location. Another highlighted story, Mr. Harold A. Franklin, does have a marker on Auburn's campus. It is located just adjacent to the University library, and his spotlight will be placed there.

3D imaging was created using a compatible camera (Insta360 one X2 camera) and taking multiple images to create a 360 effect. We used Matterport software for 360 rendering to curate the tour.

Summaries for each spotlight were embedded at an appropriate spot. These summaries were curated by members of the Friends of Baptist Hill Club at Auburn

Junior High School during the Spring 2022 semester.

Discussion

Partnerships that helped bring this project into fruition include the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities, HDFS department, Biggio Center, Office of Inclusion and Diversity, Auburn City Schools, and the History Department. The Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities donated the Matterport subscription and provided the Friends of Baptist Hill club a place for their Fall 2021 presentation night (Fig. 3).

Flaws from this project can be improved for future updates and improvements. The most notable challenge was that the camera and software were not created for outdoor spaces. This rendered the project because the majority of the tour features outside markers. The software only allows one hundred shots per space, which required us to split the tour into five different spaces instead of just one central tour. Finally, lighting was a factor in image capturing and resulted in the best images being captured between the hours of 5:30 am and 6:30 am. This created a small window for image capturing.

Plans for this project include updating the NPHC plaza once completed, adding additional spaces, displaying the virtual tour across campus, and opportunities to educate the community on Auburn's African American history.

There are an additional seven to eight locations on Auburn's campus that can be researched and added to the virtual tour. For the Fall 2022 semester, Auburn Junior High students will explore these stories with the addition of Auburn High School Auburn University Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship students. rPAAST will begin teaching classes at AHS in addition to AJHS, spreading more knowledge on Auburn's African American history and creating more content for the virtual tour. AJHS students (Friends of Baptist Hill club) will continue their work on researching stories and service to the Baptist Hill cemetery, while the AHS will have focus on researching and creating creative content for the Virtual Tour.

rPAAST plans to partner with the Office of Inclusion and Diversity to provide opportunities for the virtual

tour to be accessible on campus. The Cross-Cultural Center for Excellence (CCCE) is located on the second floor of the student center. It is popular for minority students to mingle and stop by between classes. With help from the Biggio center, we plan to place a floor-standing iPad mount in the CCCE for students and guests to interact with the virtual tour.

From this project, we hope to inspire more opportunities for education on Auburn's African American history. The Friends of Baptist Hill club at Auburn Junior High School will receive an increase in membership numbers for the next semester, which will produce an opportunity for more stories to be researched and included in the virtual tour. rPAAST hopes to expand to neighboring schools in an effort to provide interactive educational opportunities. Current campus tours will be asked to incorporate this feature into their program for guest and prospective students to utilize.



Fig. 3. Junior High students and Courtney Weeks on the night of their presentations for Fall 2021.

Statement of Research Advisor

Courtney Weeks has worked vigorously and produced great work throughout this research period. The future of this project will produce great opportunities for African American stories to be researched and spread throughout Auburn's campus and community.

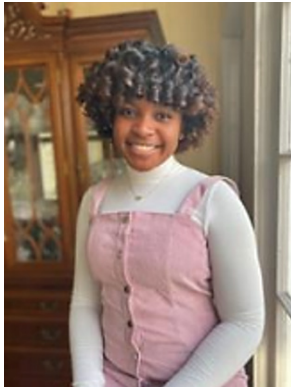
-Robert Bubb, College of Human Sciences

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[2] Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History. (2010). Lest we forget: A history of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama. Book

Authors Biography



Courtney F. Weeks is a Summer 2022 graduate from Auburn University with a B.S. degree in Human Development and Family Science. She has played key roles in researching and teaching Auburn's African American History. She is from Birmingham, Al. Her professional goal is to work with non-profit organizations in Community Outreach.



Robert Bubb is a lecturer of statistics and research methods in the College of Human Sciences at Auburn University. His research focus is working alongside the community to research, preserve, and present local African American history.