The Remembering St. Petersburg Oral History Project: Youth Empowerment and Heritage Preservation Through A Community Museum

Alilsha R. Winn, Fayetteville State University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/alilsha_winn/1/
Abstract

This article reveals how the “Remembering St. Petersburg Oral History Project” empowered African American youth through nontraditional methods of learning African American history and culture in their own neighborhoods, allowing youth to gain a greater appreciation for their elders. Additionally, the project enhanced their communication, computer, and professional skills for future success. The project involved urban youth ages 14–18 and elders over the age of 65 in the Midtown area of St. Petersburg, Florida. We used taped oral narratives, archival materials, and donated personal artifacts, to capture the memories and stories of the elders for a museum exhibit. In this article, I explore some of the challenges in the data collection-museum exhibit process: training youth, proper representation of the elders, and interactions with residents and museum contributors. This project serves as a guide to illustrate the challenges anthropologists face in heritage preservation in African American community museums, educating youth on African American history, and the decision-making process in the development of a successful Oral History project and museum exhibit in the African American community.

INTRODUCTION

In mid-July, 2005, Director of Special Projects for the City of St. Petersburg’s Midtown Development Initiative coordinated a meeting between the Director of the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum, and the Community Liaison of the Front Porch Community Development Association (CDA), Inc. to discuss ways in which the two groups could work together to secure funding for a youth-oriented project in the Jordan Park Village housing community in Midtown St. Petersburg, FL. As a result, the collaborators envisioned an oral history project that would link youth with elders (Baber 2005:17).

HISTORY OF JORDAN PARK

Located in a historic African American community in St. Petersburg, Jordan Park was established in 1941 with the donation of a portion of land by a native St. Petersburg African American, Elder Jordan, Sr. in his personal effort to assist low-income residents. Jordan was a prominent African American entrepreneur, builder, and developer. In 1939, work began on the construction of 242 housing units on 22nd Street. Located in the southern part of the city, Jordan Park was Florida’s largest public housing development, with 65 one- and two-story buildings and housed more than 400 families (Ahmed 2004). It was considered decent housing for African Americans and fostered closeness in the community through communal networks (Ahmed 2004). However, the neighborhood’s sense of security and community began to deteriorate by the 1980s; shattered by drugs and crime (Ahmed 2004:56).

HOPE VI and Revitalization of Jordan Park

In 1999, a HOPE VI grant to build new units on the property resulted in the demolishing of the Jordan Park Housing Development. The HOPE VI program is the largest single programmatic effort at deconcentrating poverty. Created in 1992, HOPE VI grew out of a national commission that focused on the worst public housing projects and proposed solutions for improving them. Created in 1992, HOPE VI grew out of a national commission that focused on the worst public housing projects and proposed solutions for improving them. HOPE VI encourages cities to demolish public housing projects and disperse the residents. In Jordan Park, the Housing Authority financed the 242-unit project, with $959,000 (Baber 2005). HOPE VI provided a “solution” to deconcentrate the poor and assimilate them into middle class society; helping lower income families become
responsible and rehabilitated (Greenbaum 2002). By providing role models for lower income residents and enabling the poor to live next to mixed income families, the poor could become prosperous and improved citizens. The $26.5 million Hope VI grant, enabled the rehabilitation of a 55 structure to upgrade the Jordan Park housing development. The upgrade included the development of recreational and medical facilities, support social services and a museum located in south central St. Petersburg, Florida, adjacent to the Wildwood Heights Neighborhood (Franklin 2003).

Unfortunately, the HOPE VI grant for Jordan Park led to major controversies between Jordan Park residents and the St. Petersburg Housing Authority. A group of residents of Jordan Park filed the initial lawsuit against the Housing Authority in early 2000, which accused the Authority of neglecting residents’ safety and mismanaging the rebuilding of the public housing community. The amended lawsuit, filed in federal court by two dozen past and present Jordan Park residents, sought to remove the Housing Authority executive director, Darrell J. Irions, and have someone else take over the agency and its $50-million demolition and rebuilding project at Jordan Park (LaPeter 2000). Money from a $27-million federal HOPE VI grant funded the renovation to reconstruct Jordan Park. Through a contest, youth competed to come up with best name for the museum (Franklin 2003) and subsequently a name was chosen, the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum (see Figure 1).

Museum

After missed deadlines for completion, constant delays in its opening due to lack of funding, personnel changes, controversial issues surrounding the redevelopment of Jordan Park, in April of 2006, the museum opened. Community leaders, dignitaries, and residents from both the local and surrounding communities attended the Ribbon Cutting ceremony. It appeared that residents from the community were pleased with the museum’s completion and appearance.

Under the direction of an applied anthropologist, the late Dr. Ginger Baber, the Carter G.
Remembering St. Petersburg

The Carter G. Woodson is the only African American museum in St. Petersburg. It was necessary to preserve the rich history of the Jordan Park area and its surrounding African American community. Therefore, having an African American museum was a great accomplishment for the city and the community. The mission of the museum was: to preserve, present, and interpret African American history and to promote an understanding among various groups in the St. Petersburg community (Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum 2011).

COLLABORATORS’ ROLES TO SOLVE A PROBLEM

The establishment of an oral history project would connect youth and elders, reducing a problematic reality for the community—instances of disrespect and hostility between these two groups. Collaborators found that youth lacked a connection to their grandparents through intergenerational links, creating a void often filled with a lack of understanding and respect for the daily realities of senior life (Baber 2005). Through interviews and the collection of artifacts for a museum exhibit, the project could benefit to help the community in increasing positive relationships between youth and elders in the neighborhood, to reduce inter-generational conflict or disrespect (Baber 2005).

The key players in this effort were the staff and board of the Front Porch (CDA), Inc., and the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum. Both of these entities saw the benefits of constructive after-school opportunities for youth and avenues for capturing the lives and memories of the elders in the Jordan Park Village neighborhood, and other areas in Midtown St. Petersburg.

Formed in 1999, the nonprofit organization, Front Porch (CDA), Inc.’s mission often encourages and supports citizens in efforts to identify and strengthen existing community assets, and assist individuals, businesses, and communities with economic development through education and collaboration. The Front Porch (CDA), Inc. supported the efforts of the Remembering St. Petersburg project through the work of a liaison, Ms. Lolita Dash, who served as the recruitment coordinator, and assisted in other aspects of the project (financially and marketing the exhibit). The museum’s role was to support the success of the project through sponsorship, designing and providing the training for the youth and volunteers, and host all activities related to the project (Baber 2005).

Directed by the late Dr. Ginger Baber, the Remembering St. Petersburg project began in January 2006, with youth learning about African American history in the United States, interviewing skills and lifelong skills that would enhance their future. Through this project, students built relationships with their elders, appreciated those who lived before them, learned about their history and culture from individuals from their own neighborhoods. The director, trained in qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation, provided the on-going monitoring of project activities (Baber 2005). Due to incomplete museum renovations, for the first four months, the project took place at the Enoch Davis Community Center. After the completion of the museum, project participants moved into the museum classroom.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Although the Remembering St. Petersburg project began in January 2006, which left only nine months to complete an exhibit, departing from its original 12-month period, the students in this project would: (1) receive training in collecting and transcribing oral history data, active listening skills, and in collecting and documenting archival material and personal artifacts; (2) collect narratives from a minimum of three individuals per three person team over a three-month period; (3) transcribe and interpret the narrative and archival data (three- to four-month process); (4) plan and create an exhibition for the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum about the narratives and artifacts collected; and (5) participate in a public installation of the exhibition and a reception and recognition event at the end of the year (Baber 2005).

The outreach coordinator recruited youth participants and elders through previous acquaintances with community organizations and key individuals in the Front Porch Community. Outreach involved distribution of flyers and other information to agencies and organizations serving youth and elders. The outreach coordinator and project director conducted presentations to key organizations in the Midtown area for recruitment. Teen and elders self-enrollment in the proximate Jordan Park Village neighborhood occurred as well.

Elders met certain criteria for eligibility of the Remembering St. Petersburg project: they had to be 65 and over, and live in St. Petersburg for at
least 35 years. The director recruited elders through the Enoch Davis Center, which provided many activities and resources for elders. The outreach coordinator initially recruited 20 student researchers for the project from the surrounding African American neighborhoods of the Enoch Davis Center and the museum.

Student researchers, ages 14–18, represented low-income and working-class backgrounds. They received a salary, working part-time, two days a week, Tuesday, 3–6 p.m., and Saturday, 11 a.m.–1 p.m. Most of them were unfamiliar with oral histories, research, basic skills needed for the project, and anthropology. However, Dr. Baber assured the student researchers that by the end of the project, they all would be anthropologists.

FROM INTERN TO PROJECT DIRECTOR
As a second-year graduate student, I was looking for an opportunity to gain experience as an applied anthropologist in community heritage preservation. Hired as an intern in the fall of 2005, I trained and guided teams of student researchers and community volunteers through the process of collecting oral histories. Unfortunately, four months into the project and two weeks after the museum’s opening, the director of the museum and project passed away. This was devastating for all participants of the project, especially the students. As a result, I took on the role as project director, as well as other duties within the project.

Training and preparing the student researchers for interviews was an extensive process. During the first four to five months of the project, they engaged in numerous activities in preparation for interviews. We provided the student researchers with his or her own notebook for activities, note taking, and training materials. In the training process, student researchers were given specific decades, from 1900s to the 1990s, to determine what events occurred during this time-period in the world, the United States, Florida and in the city of St. Petersburg. This activity equipped them with background knowledge of events that their elder interviewees could possibly share. Other activities included, testing their knowledge on St. Petersburg Black history and role-playing; developing solutions to challenges of elders new to the city St. Petersburg using library resources and critiquing each other during role playing of elders during interview training.

Student researchers contacted 35 elders to confirm and schedule interviews in the elders’ homes, given the elders’ age and lack of transportation to the museum. Each week, students, accompanied by an adult volunteer, visited the elders’ homes. Some elders would come to the museum for interviews. After each interview, they took a picture of the elders, downloaded photos on the computer, scanned donated photos, documents, and articles for the exhibit. They created files on each interviewee and placed interviewee information in boxes for storage and protection of donated items, then rendered follow-up visits with elders to obtain photos or items.

After conducting interviews, the student researchers reviewed the transcripts to ensure congruency between it and the tape interviews. Once this process was completed, they finalized and saved transcriptions. Student researchers, volunteers, exhibit designers, and I coded and analyzed the collected data, and created written narratives, then selected the content for the museum exhibit as well as its development. Through the transcribing and editing process, we chose quotes and created descriptions of elders for display panels for the exhibit, based on different topics: Entertainment/Fashion, Community Events, Households, and Education. Student researchers also participated in developing their own ideas for the exhibit. They reviewed the images, documents, and artifacts donated by the elders, chose appropriate quotes from transcriptions, then identified appropriate visual aids for display. Exhibit designers and I determined the final presentation of the exhibit and display.

CHALLENGES
There were many challenges navigating through this project while working with collaborators, who had their own expectations and goals. The collaborators consisted of the museum board and staff, Front Porch, community residents, youth, elders, and exhibit designers. There were operational and procedural differences between the museum board and Front Porch, which affected the project’s process. Since both the museum and Front Porch staff were main contributors to the project, they wanted to ensure proper recognition and representation for their role in the project separately. The museum staff wanted to ensure the proper presentation of the museum as a strong establishment of prestige, culture, and history. Front Porch insisted their involvement in the decision-making process of the exhibit, project-training procedures, and the opening ceremony.

As an applied anthropologist, researcher, and project director, with my own set of rules and
goals, I had to make major decisions about the students, elders and the museum exhibit, while considering the ideas of the contributors of this project and fulfilling the needs of the community. I shared the same vision as Dr. Baber to preserve community history and involve youth. My goal was to carry out her vision of a community museum, with youth at the forefront. This was a great responsibility, with many pressures to complete a large community project. I began the internship as an assistant, expecting to develop skills with the assistance of Dr. Baber. After her passing, the process shifted; I felt that it was impossible to accomplish such a large task. Although, I am sure there were some doubts by community leaders and collaborators of the project’s success, many museum board members, Front Porch staff, and exhibit designers supported my efforts to continue the project to its completion successfully.

However, collaborators’ unfamiliarity with the implementation of an oral history project, as well as the use of anthropological methods and ethics created some challenges. For instance, leaders of a middle school drama group wanted to use interviewee transcripts to develop a play. However, elder consent forms only included the use of transcriptions for the exhibit and publishing. In order to loan transcripts, we would have to develop another informed consent form. We also ran the risk of middle school students misrepresenting the elders due to the lack of clarity in some of transcripts, connection to the project process and follow-up interviews. Some collaborators did not see these circumstances as a dilemma, and were willing to give the transcripts to the drama group. However, after explaining to the collaborators the ethical issues surrounding this matter, we kept the transcripts confidential. Instead, the middle school students visited the museum to view the project exhibit, took notes, and obtained information from the student researchers to develop the play. Although I thought I was prepared to direct this project, I did not expect to encounter so many differences in ideas and concepts between student researchers, community collaborators, elders, and myself.

Teaching students how to conduct qualitative methods and assist them in critical thinking took a lot of time. Students created their own questions and established a guideline of questions for interviews. However, during the interview process, they had to learn how to probe to get additional information from elders, properly use a tape recorder, and simply ask the right questions. Throughout the project, we modified the questions to suit the students. In addition, they were not familiar with historic landmarks, businesses, and other facilities from interviews with elders.

In addition, the generational and class gap between the youth and board members often times posed challenges. Many student researchers represented low-income families. Some museum board members felt students exhibited “improper” behavior, loud talking, excessive use of Ebonics, and lacked proper dress. Therefore, there were limited interactions between some museum board members, staff, and the students. There were also issues of space sharing. For example, explicit website pop-ups infiltrated the museum’s main computer. Although, museum staff, board members, volunteers, students and I used the computer, some museum board members immediately accused the students of visiting these sites, without properly investigating the issue, and suggested that I speak with the students about this matter and forbid them from using the computer. It was questionable whether some board members’ view of the students contributed to these accusations.

When the student researchers came to the museum, we had to address issues surrounding their personal lives. Conflicts with responsibilities at home, school and with friends were a problem. In one case, a student researcher brought her younger relative to the museum; she had no other option but to bring her to work. Sending the student home would prevent necessary training and work for the project. As a result, I attended to the child. Accommodations were made to ensure their participation. Sometimes that meant training students while holding babies in my arms, and babysitting children while the students worked.

Many students had difficulties in reading, writing, saving documents on the computer, and digital equipment, like cameras. None of them were exposed to anything like this project. I had to approach students in many unique ways in order to retain them in the project, understanding their reality. Alice McIntyre’s work described in her book *Inner-City Kids: Adolescents Confront Life and Violence in an Urban Community* (2000:198) reflects these challenges as she writes, “The starting point for investigating social and educational issues with urban youth is to engage with them in ongoing processes of critical reflection and action that are aimed at better understanding their realities.”
Despite being part of the project, student researchers still had to deal with their lived experiences of violence, death, and pregnancy. Therefore, I could not begin the workday with them to conduct research or interviews, without attending to these issues. Regularly, we devoted 20–30 minutes for check-ins. By doing this, they were able to express their thoughts and feelings in ways that would not interfere with their ability to work. Unfortunately, though, I fired a few students for aggressive and disrespectful behavior. In reflecting back on my role in this project, I see that I was an anthropologist, supervisor, mentor, mother, and confidant.

Due the elders’ ages, we quickly scheduled and initiated interviews; unfortunately, two of the elders passed away during and shortly after the project. Many times, elders would become ill, unable to carry out interviews and therefore re-schedule. Some elders would forget their scheduled interviews, needing constant reminders before initial visits to their homes. Elders also had a difficult time remembering past experiences when describing what life was like growing up in St. Petersburg.

Volunteers assisted with the project in multiple ways. They assisted in training youth, worked with staff to interview elders, and assisted in planning the exhibit. Volunteers would also drive students to the homes of the elders, assist interpreting data, edit transcriptions, and ensure students were working progressively. Yet, there were some challenges. Initially, the project required at least five volunteers; however, it was difficult to recruit volunteers. We faced difficulties in volunteer participation, consistent attendance, and conflicts with scheduling. After Dr. Baber’s passing, we received more volunteers. Nevertheless, training volunteers four to five months into the project posed more challenges in ensuring that the volunteers thoroughly understood the goals of the project, but most important gaining the youth’s trust.

DEVELOPING THE EXHIBIT
Museums board members, curators, directors, and staff face challenges in proper presentation and display within African American communities. Just as museums serve as multiple functions of display, there are multiple players. During the development of the exhibit, the collaboration between Front Porch, museum board members, exhibit designers, residents and I, posed many challenges. Karp (1991:12) found that, “All exhibitions are inevitably organized based on assumptions about the intentions of the objects’ producers, the cultural skills and qualifications of the audience, the claims to authoritativeness made by the exhibition, and judgments of the aesthetic merit or authenticity of the objects or settings exhibited.” Lowenthal (1985:xxiii) examined how and why we change the past, and the effect of changes on our environment and ourselves, arguing that we are presented with choices, whether to keep relics or to remove them, to leave them in fragments or make them whole again. This virtually affects whose past is experienced. Their arguments parallel the decisions of museum exhibit items.

As stated earlier, the exhibit featured four themes: Households, Entertainment-Fashion, Education, and Community Events. During the interview process, students asked elders if they would like to donate items for the exhibit. We received many items from residents and elders such as doll figurines, pictures, baskets, a cipher, a saw, African statues, and even old Avon bottles. Many of the items worked well within the themes. We left out items that did not fit or match the themes of the exhibit. Decision makers disputed over the appropriateness of displaying certain items based on time and social relevance of the exhibit. The exhibit designers and I disagreed with others, with displaying some of the items, particularly the Avon bottles and statues.

As an anthropologist, I asked, “In what context are the Avon bottles significant?” and “Is there a story behind the bottles that represent the exhibit?” This incident reflects the many challenges in the decision-making process of presenting African American history using items and artifacts. In the end, as project director, I made an executive decision not to use the Avon bottles, neither the saw, cipher, or the figurines. This parallels to producers and consumers of historical discourse, owners of the means of historical production and displacement and the denied access of ownership (Trouillot 1995). Therefore, ownership of the past determines how past is represented, presented and displayed. In this case, the project director, decides exhibition and what counts as an important object in history.

We faced decisions whether to display certain items or not, and the challenge determining the proper place of those items. Therefore, decisions for displaying certain objects, involved those who created or directed the exhibit. According to Taborsky (1990:74), museums have a social function to explore objects, as signs, as objects, which are socially meaningful, but an object on its own has no meaning, objects exist only as signs. Curators
gave license to speak for them (Jones 1993:215). Stuart Hall’s (1997) discussion of two characteristics of museum objects: their physical appearance and their meaning, suggests that objects are described as documents or evidence of the past, and are regarded as pristine material embodiments of cultural essences, which transcend time, place, and historical contingency. Curators and designers give these characteristics meaning.

Shopes (1986:249) writes, “Developing links between a community history project and its community is difficult. Any such project that seeks to involve local people in producing their own history and to have meaning for the community itself much confronts complex social relationships and problems of interpretation.” These interpretative problems existed throughout the project.

Other challenges within the project included: making certain of correct names and spelling of businesses, people, and landmarks for accuracy on the panels of the elders, and properly quoting elders. Student researchers interviewed most of the elders in their own home, and therefore, they felt very comfortable during the interviews. This comfort level meant that many used African American dialect or code-switched to explain and describe events or experiences. The challenge rested with how to choose quotes appropriate for the exhibit without losing their authenticity. We wanted to prevent any elder complaints of their presentation and display in the exhibit. Many of the elders were former teachers, lawyers, and other professionals, and we wanted to ensure that the elders had the best presentation of themselves possible. As a result, we carefully used one quote on their individual panels, and we placed other quotes throughout the museum anonymously. In one instance, one elder was not satisfied with her photo taken during the time of the interview, and she visited the museum after she came from the hair salon, and had her picture retaken. It was also a challenge to convince elders that the items in their own home were worth using for an exhibit.

We also faced the challenge of keeping track of elders and residents’ items. It was imperative to properly label donated items, input the data on the computer, as well as properly store items. However, the Remembering St. Petersburg items shared the same storage space with future museum exhibit items, making it extremely difficult to keep track of items. This included returning and maintaining items in its original state, and ensuring items were not lost or damaged. Limited museum hours of operations of three days a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 11 to 2 p.m. prevented residents who worked during the day to view the exhibit.

Using Museum Space

Sikes’ (1992) examination on a Native American museum revealed one of seven metaphorical structures as a political system relating to the volunteers and staff representing upper middle class communities in Phoenix, while Native Americans’ culture on view were marginalized in the power system. In comparison, the board members and staff at the Carter G. Woodson Museum consisted of prominent or well-known individuals in their community. The surrounding community of the museum is located in a low-income and working class African American neighborhood. Although some Carter G. Woodson Museum board members believed, they were not the target audience, middle-class blacks seemed to be the museum’s natural constituents (Gezari 2006). Most of the time, museum space appeared to benefit the upper/middle class. Local community organizations that held meetings at the museum represented fraternities and clubs consisting of middle-class residents.

For instance, the museum hosted many private receptions, such as the opening of the Tuskegee Airmen exhibit and a visit by John Hope Franklin. Although the events were free, the event was by invitation only. African American elite could contribute to this challenge by using space for their own purposes, excluding the larger surrounding African American community.

The challenge in African American museums such as the Carter G. Woodson Museum is to ensure the proper usage of the museum space making it available for all groups of people, especially the surrounding community. Although many museums’ goals are to serve multiple functions of education of African American history, sponsor community events, provide a space for community groups meetings, exhibits for the public, and to strengthen the community, it is important that these multiple functions are carried out. Gaither’s (1992:60) discussion of African American museums and communities reveals that, “The close relationship between African American museums and their communities permits museums to validate the communities’ experiences.” For this reason, museum programs must have a familiarity and a truthfulness that cause the communities to feel a strong bond of kinship with the institutions (Gaither 1992). Some African American museums like the Carter G. Woodson Museum continue to
confront the struggle for this type of relationship within their communities.

Student researchers compiled all of the narratives collected to share with the community a portion of African American history and community in St. Petersburg through this exhibit. By the end of the project, students interviewed 35 elders, and collected photographs and artifacts for use in the development of the exhibit, which displayed images of the elders, historic landmarks affiliated with the elders, and artifacts that would enhance their stories.

The Exhibit Opening
On September 30, 2006, the exhibit opened. The Remembering St. Peter Oral History Project hosted a brief program before the exhibit opening inviting all of the elders as our honorees, and recognized their willingness to open their homes and share their stories and memories. The exhibit consisted of four cases representing the themes from the donated items. Panels of each elder interviewed by the students lined along the walls of the interior of the museum. Panels consisted of a current photo of the elders and brief summary about their lives and accomplishments. The panels varied, with old pictures of family members, artifacts, newspaper clippings, or anything significant or unique to tell “their story.”

After the passing of Dr. Baber, I encouraged students to write their thoughts about “Ms. Ginger,” and what she meant to them. This was a way for the students to cope with their grief and contribute to the exhibit. As a result, the exhibit designers and I chose appropriate quotes to create the “Remembering Ms. Ginger” Panel, featured at the end of the exhibit. We also recognized each student researcher for their work, presenting them with certificates.

FINDINGS
After the project ended in September 2006, I conducted my own follow-up interviews. I wanted to know about the student researchers’ experiences and thoughts about the project to determine their progression. I found that nearly none of the students learned about African American history in school, limited during Black history month, to only Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Students learned more about African American history through the Remembering St. Petersburg project. Their participation in the project enabled them to learn history of Carter G. Woodson for the first time. One student revealed that the project showed her that Blacks were just as important as whites; another added that there were hidden things that she did not know, particularly, that Jordan Park had so much history.

There was an increase in respect for elders since the project ended. One student researcher admitted how she learned more about African American history and the past through the elders, and appreciated life more. Some students never interacted with elders before, but through the project, they realized that elders were regular people and do regular things. “They are people of wisdom,” one student stated. “You must take time and get understanding and wisdom. I prefer wisdom than new technology.” In her reference to elders, one student researcher concluded, “I rather be around them than young people.” Although student researchers based their participation on a steady salary, their overall reason for staying with the project was to learn about their African American history and be a part of the museum in the neighborhood. Many of them agreed that it was hard work. “A lot of effort, but it got done,” one student quoted. Students felt that they were glad they were here to learn about their own culture. Some found that they learned skills and will always remember this project. Through their stories and artifacts, these young interviewers gained a greater understanding of past generations’ experiences in St. Petersburg and increased their level of respect for elders in the community.

Dr. Baber administered a pre evaluation test of the work experience in the project. At the beginning of the project, student researchers completed evaluation forms of the Self-Assessment of Computer and Digital and Media Ability. This tested their abilities in typing sentences, editing pictures or graphics, Internet research use, saving files, and operating digital equipment. The assessment also evaluated students on digital camera and video recorder use, uploading pictures to a computer, after school activities, work, and volunteer experience. From this evaluation, most students scored poorly on many skills.

At the end of the project, I re-administered this same test. Students’ post-evaluation of the project revealed a major increase in skills in the ability to type sentences on the computer, working with graphics, searching for files or images, format documents, and use of a tape recorder. The students were more involved in after-school projects. This was the first job for many students. By the end of the project, there were ten student researchers; with seven students evaluated.
Through the project, students learned computer and communication skills, and proper scanning and cropping images. All of them learned how to transcribe and edit transcriptions, gained skills in note taking, answering phones, and taking messages. One student stated that she learned to be more patient and project her voice. Another learned how to label for filing. All of the students learned how to save and file documents. During the final month of the project, students created their own resumes based upon skills they earned from the project. They all agreed that they would participate in a project like this one again. All of them also felt that the skills they learned in the project could be useful for future jobs.

Over a period of nine months, student researchers, received training in data collection and transcribing oral histories, active listening skills, collecting and documenting archival material and personal artifacts to plan and create an exhibition for the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum. Students gained knowledge of African American history; particular in their own communities, neighborhoods, and the city of St. Petersburg, Florida. The project enabled better relationships with youth and elders, with a greater appreciation of past generations.

Historic Preservation and Visibility
The exhibit enabled us to highlight the lives of one of the first Black record producers in Florida, a community and neighborhood activist for youth, business owners, and individuals who simply took care of their families to ensure a better life. The exhibit provided an opportunity for the proper recognition of those whose lives contributed to the well-being and success of their neighborhood. At the exhibit, many elders took pictures next to their panels, with a sense of pride. All of the narratives collected by the student researchers were compiled to share with the community a portion of African American history and communities in St. Petersburg through this exhibit.

After the Remembering St. Petersburg project ended, 30 students enrolled in seventh and eighth grades at a local middle school created an original script in collaborative teams using the information of the elders on the panels. Student researchers from the Remembering St. Petersburg project became the experts and assisted the middle school students in the development of the script, shared their experiences working on the project, as well as described the personalities of the elders interviewed. The development of a play by the middle school students not only assisted the students in learning African American history, but it also gave additional voice to the elders in the community and historic preservation and visibility.

Benefits of the Carter G. Woodson Museum and Remembering St. Petersburg
Throughout history, African Americans’ history suffered greatly from exclusion and manipulation of the African American past. This could have led to the pressing need for African Americans to rewrite, reconstruct, and present their history in their own space, conducive to their culture and ideas. “Seeing the past in our terms, we necessarily revise what previous interpreters have seen in their terms, and reshape artifacts and memories accordingly. But beyond involuntary alterations, explicit aims prompt us to replace or add to an adequate past” (Lowenthal 1985:325).

The search for truth of African American history, launched by Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) in 1915 (Stewart 1994), encouraged scholars to research, write, and publish in the area of Black history, challenging the public history, becoming in the process the “keeper of the record” of the African American struggle.

The Remembering St. Pete Oral History Project provided an opportunity to present the historical voice and experiences of African Americans in the United States, Florida, and most importantly the city of St. Petersburg in an effort to preserve this history for present and future generations of residents. The project enabled youth to interview the elders who grew up in the Jordan Park area and surrounding African American communities as a way to preserve and pass down St. Petersburg’s African American history.

APPLIED RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD
For applied anthropology, this project provides a discussion about teaching African American history and culture using nontraditional methods to youth. Nontraditional methods refer to an alternative from the formal education within public school systems of learning history. The method of oral history or oral tradition are tools different from many public school approaches. Anthropology is relevant in its research methods to conducting this kind of work, which is useful in the promotion of education and history (see Appendix for recommendations).
According to the student researchers, a thorough account of African American history was not taught in their schools. However, through the project, they learned about their history and culture in their own neighborhoods. However, this is not a new approach. Oral tradition, passing down information from generation to generation, is a characteristic of African and African American culture. Learning about family history through older relatives at family reunions and gatherings is common practices, even in my own family. In the case for this project, an elder became the history textbook.

It is important to value the stories of communities and their attempt to tell “one’s own story” using community museums. The purpose for using a museum for a project and exhibit like the Remembering St. Petersburg project is to bring forth those oral traditions out in the open, for the public. African American history is not hidden inside our households, it is available for everyone. It is powerful; historically ignored, erased, and even pushed aside. However, through projects like these and its incorporation through a community museum, it allows the reclamation of African American history.

CONCLUSION
Throughout history, African Americans faced many challenges in efforts to preserve their own history, and present the truth of African American experiences and events. It is important in what Shackel (2001:655) examines as, “what aspects of the past are remembered, and how they are remembered and interpreted.” The Remembering St. Petersburg project provided an opportunity for young people to document the stories and lives of the 35 individuals, who contributed to their community and the city of St. Petersburg, providing the preservation of African American history for future generations.

The project enabled historic preservation of African American neighborhoods, youth empowerment through nontraditional methods of learning African American history and culture, and the recognition of the past and present lives of the African American community.

The experience from this project produced relationships between heritage education for youth and academic achievement. Therefore, it is my goal to expand my work on projects like The Remembering St. Petersburg Oral History Project to other African American communities, analyzing how “non-traditional” methods of teaching African American history and culture impact African American youth (academically, professionally, and personally), through the knowledge of elders using oral narratives. It is imperative to conduct further research on the effectiveness of African American museums by analyzing museum exhibits and their educational and visual presentations to improve youth interactive learning of African American history and culture. Working on this project has been and will be an unforgettable experience. Through the loss of those close, challenges to maintain success, and pursuit of the unknown, this experience was worth every moment. Although the project has come to end, this is just beginning to embark on other endeavors to ensure the instillation of African American history and culture. This project is an example of the opportunity for applied anthropologists’ contribution in using anthropological methods and knowledge to assist in preserving African American history, educating youth, and presenting the contributions of African Americans in their communities.

Alisha R. Winn
Department of Sociology,
Fayetteville State University, 1200 Murchison Road, Fayetteville, NC, 28301; awinn1@uncfsu.edu

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Special thanks to the residents of the Jordan Park community and the surrounding communities in the Mid-town area of St. Petersburg, Florida for their participation and support of this project, and the elders who shared their lives and contributions to the city of St. Petersburg with us. I would like to give special recognition to the youth participants for their dedication to this project. I am proud to have worked with such wonderful young people. Although this project transformed the youth, it also transformed me. I am grateful for the assistance and support of Lolita Dash and Front Porch CDA, Inc., the Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum, and Holman and Reilly Designs. I also would like to thank the volunteers, Brett A. Mervis, Tyna Middleton, Rev. Ted Lockhart, the City of St. Petersburg’s Midtown Development Initiative, St. Petersburg Housing Authority. Great appreciation to the University of South Florida’s Anthropology and Africana Studies Department, Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville State University’s Department of Sociology, the Association of Black Anthropologists, the Vera Green Award Committee for selecting this article, the Vera Green
Award Reviewers, and the late Dr. Ginger Baber who for just a short period I had the pleasure of knowing. I am grateful to be able to share her vision to educate and empower, as she would say, “OUR people, telling OUR story.” Thank you Dr. Baber for choosing me to lead such a great project.

NOTES
1. Dr. Baber served both as museum and Remembering St. Petersburg project director.
2. To shorten the name, I refer to the project as the Remembering St. Petersburg throughout the article.
3. Throughout the article I use students and student researchers interchangeably; they are the same.
4. Dr. Baber provided office and research supplies and training for students. After her passing, I continued the initial training for student researchers. Dr. Baber and I trained student researchers in interviewing, probing, structured, and unstructured interviews, and other qualitative methods.
5. For two months, each week, I assigned students a particular personality, that is, an elder distracted by grandkids during the interview; as some students played the role as elders and other students determined proper steps in the interview process.
6. Other project images can be viewed in the Supporting Information.

REFERENCES CITED


APPENDIX
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT
The Remembering St. Petersburg Oral History Project ended successfully, despite its challenges. However, for applied anthropologists and researchers, there are many recommendations to improve and/or enhance this project for future success:

- Providing background information on each student before recruitment (grades, attendance, and behavior), interaction in their home and community, can determine the level of interests and prevent any disciplinary problems.
• Assigning an elder volunteer who grew up in the neighborhood and who are familiar with historical landmarks and events in the community will provide accuracy of spelling of names, locations, and other pertinent information for panels and biographies during the review of final and edited transcripts.
• Extending project for a year or more will give the director, volunteers, and students, ample time for follow-up interviews of the elders to ensure accuracy and/or additional information that was not obtained during the initial interview. Extended time will also enable students to gather more items or artifacts for the exhibit. It will also allow for follow-up interviews with Elders to obtain additional information.
• Ensure proper training for employees to enable awareness of the project, and their roles within the project. If employees do not begin or complete training in specific period allotted, employees cannot continue employment. Additional staff for specific duties or tasks would also enhance the process of the project. For example, a staff member who specifically reads over transcripts after student editing, for correct wording of landmarks/business and contact the elderly for accuracy would alleviate additional duties of the project director.
• Establishing an exhibit consultant early in the project will enable professional expertise in creating an exhibit. It will also allow project employees, volunteers, and assistants to have a clearer vision of the exhibit as well as a progressive development of the exhibit.
• More parent involvement in the project. Parents involved in the interest of the participants will give the parents an idea of the work of the students, progression, and accomplishments. This will also enable better relations with students and project staff and volunteers for future projects and programs.

**Supporting Information**

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

**Figure S1.** Students Visit Elder’s Home for Interview
**Figure S2.** Education and Household Items Case for Museum Exhibit
**Figure S3.** Students Working in the Museum Classroom