

Maroon and Free Black Communities;

Ethnicity, heritage and public understanding.

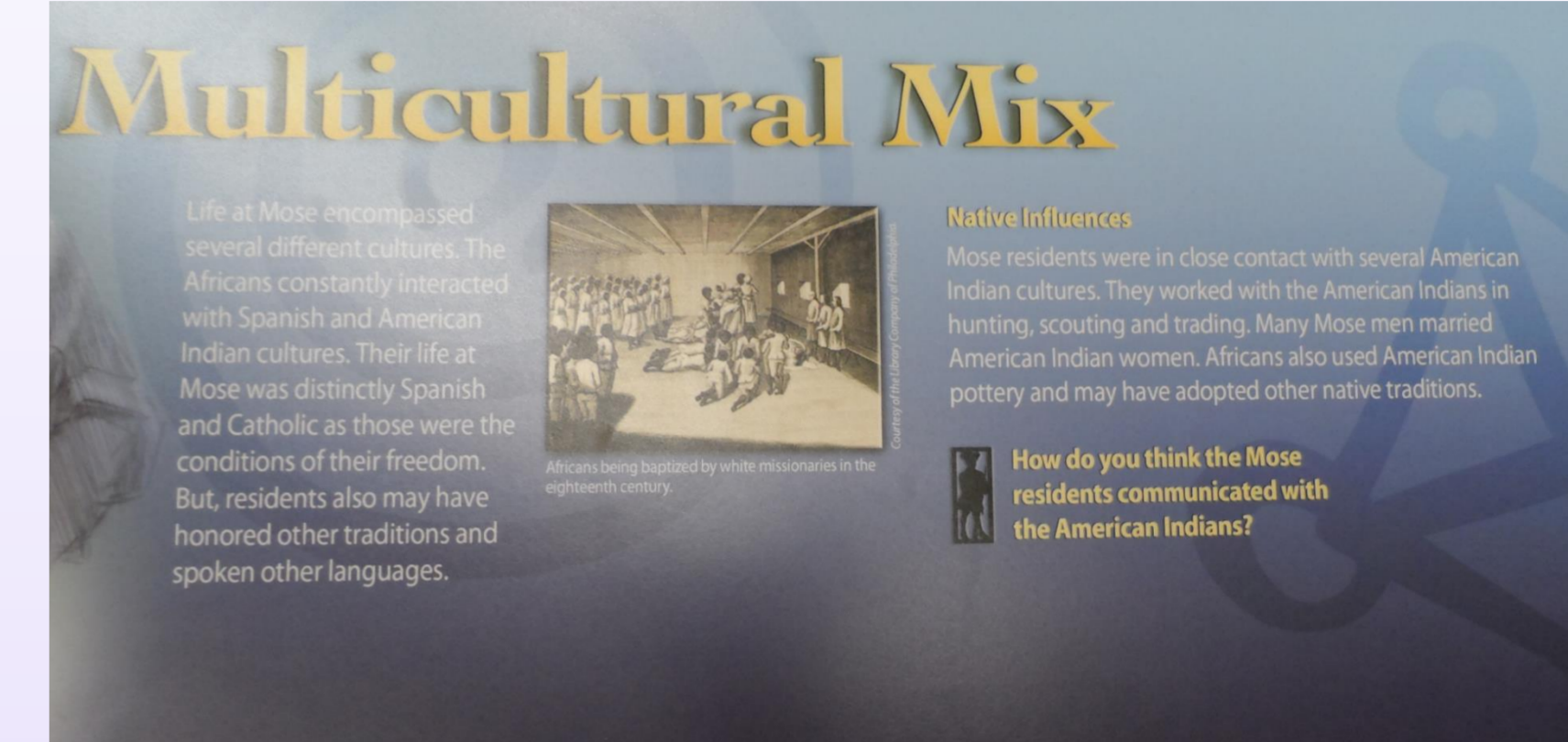
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Introduction:

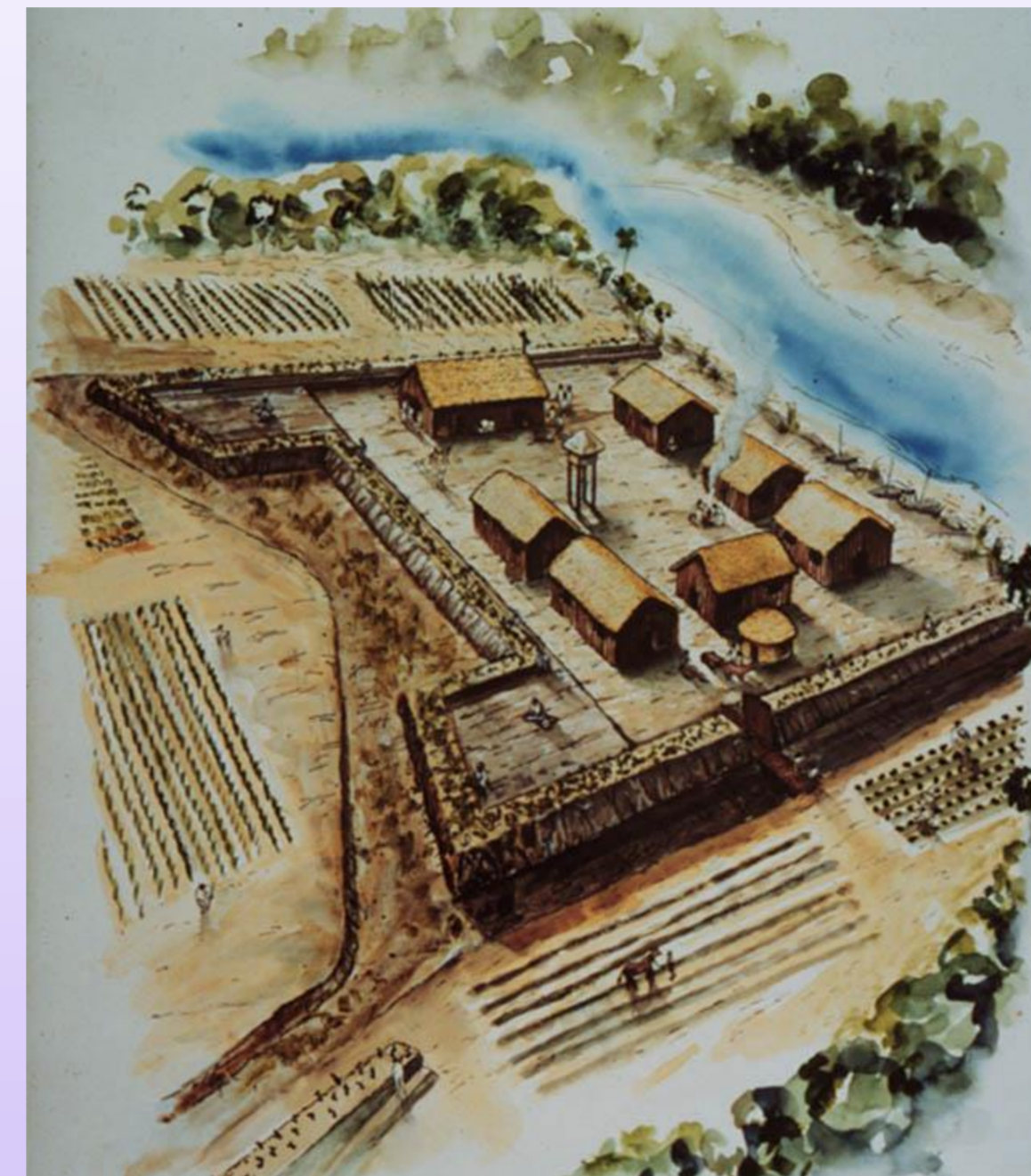
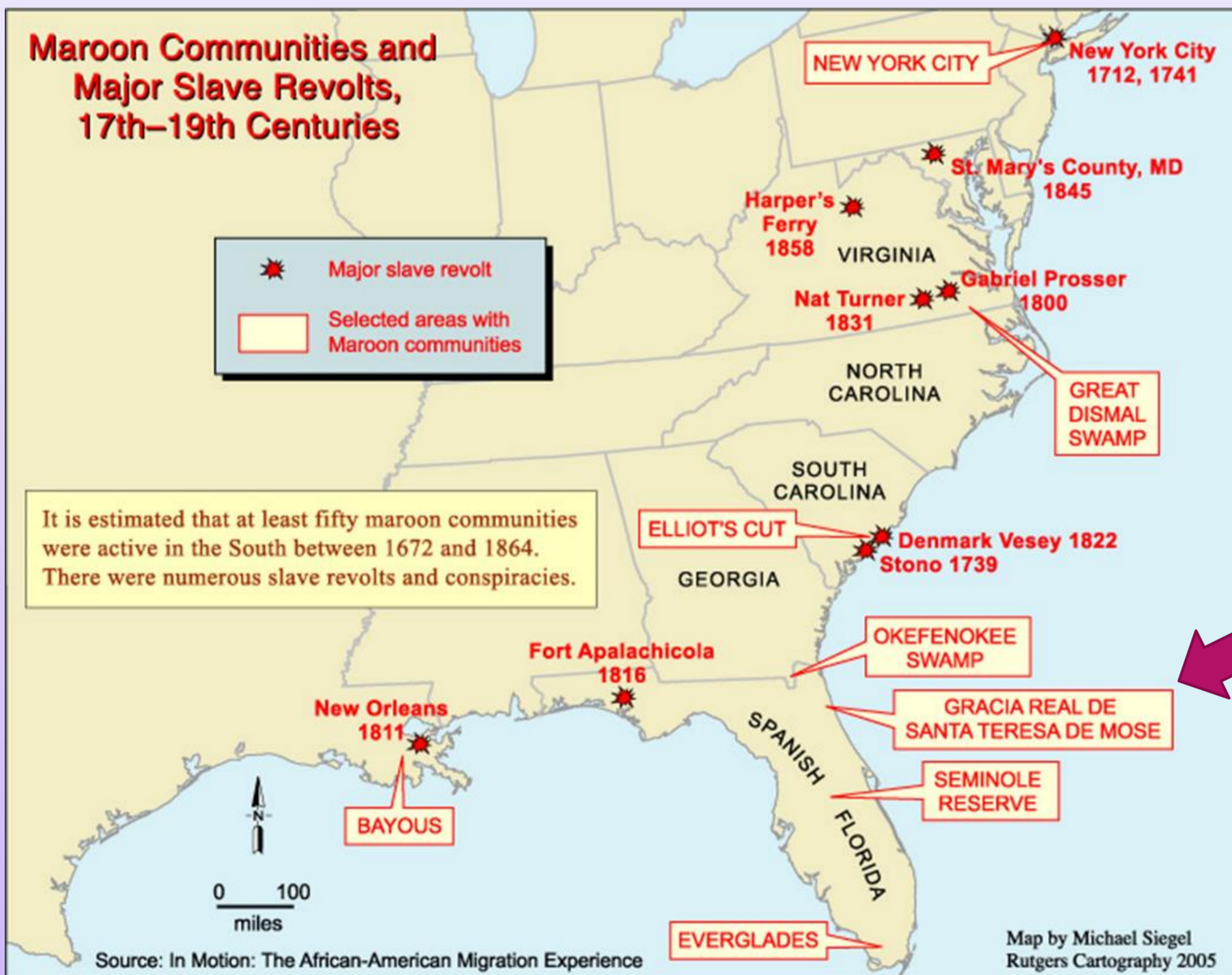
It is well known that maroon communities were established by individuals escaping from slavery in North America and the Caribbean during the 17th -19th centuries, but as recent archaeological work has shown the ethnic diversity of these communities was in fact enormous. Alongside people of colour lived native Americas and even disaffected Europe settlers.

Fort Mosé, St. Augustine, Florida:

During my internship it became apparent that Fort Mosé is a forgotten site in St. Augustine. Although the Spanish historic town centre is a popular tourist attraction, only 5000-6000 people per year visit Fort Mosé itself.



One of few displays board from Fort Mosé which refers to interaction between the residents of the fort and others, including native Americans. Most of the emphasis even here is on dealings with the Spanish settlers at St. Augustine.



Artist's reconstruction of Fort Mosé, the first free black community in St. Augustine (Florida), established in 1738. People of colour and Timucua worked, traded and fought alongside each other at Fort Mosé and intermarriage was common.

Right: member of the black militia
Left: Timucua woman.



Monthly re-enactments mainly focus on the successes of the free black militia at Fort Mosé.

Aims:

- To explore the extent to which the archaeologically-documented native American presence is reflected in contemporary heritage presentation at maroon sites today.
- Through an internship at Fort Mosé, Florida to observe educational materials, guided tours and information boards in order to critique the information these provide on the Timucua (native American) presence.

References:

Deagan, K and MacMahon, D. (1995) Fort Mosé: Colonial America's Black Fortress of Freedom, Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
Thompson, AO. (2006) Flight to Freedom, Jamaica: University of West Indies press.
Agorsah, EK. (1994) Maroon heritage: archaeological, ethnographical and historical perspectives, Barbados: Canoe Press.



The display boards at Fort Mosé focus almost wholly on enslavement, escape from slavery, and the black presence at the site.

Conclusion:

- Fort Mosé, in common with other maroon heritage sites such as the Great Dismal Swamp Museum, foregrounds one aspect of the past at the expense of others.
- It is clear from my research that the understandable desire to focus on successful resistance to slavery means that other pasts are largely overlooked.
- It remains to be seen how far archaeological finds from these sites – which point to multi-ethnic communities – will eventually seed into here.