



Black Resiliency in the Caribbean: Cat Island, Bahamas

Delaney Sebora

Research Mentor: Dr. Anita Gonzalez



Research Questions

- How do traditional practices on Cat Island reflect its Afro-Caribbean residents' historical and contemporary experiences?
- In what ways do these practices contribute to environmental sustainability and community resilience?
- What role do oral histories play in preserving the cultural heritage of Cat Island, and how do they challenge colonial and Eurocentric narratives?

Abstract

Over a 10-day fieldwork period, our team explored Cat Island, which spans 150 square miles, and engaged with residents—farmers, herbalists, historians, and artisans—along its 45-mile road. By conducting in-person interviews and recording them, we aimed to capture authentic perspectives and ancestral knowledge. This approach challenges colonial and Eurocentric frameworks that have long dominated ethnographic and historical research, offering a more accurate representation of the island's rich cultural heritage.

Cat Island

Cat Island's environment reflects a lifestyle deeply rooted in sustainable agriculture, wellness, and cultural traditions. Cat Island's infrastructure integrates seamlessly with its surroundings, exemplifying a commitment to environmental intentionality.

The island's residents are descendants of those who thrived despite colonization and forced enslavement, preserving a vibrant cultural heritage through practices like "Rake-and-Scrape" music and traditional farming. Oral histories play a crucial role in documenting these traditions.



Left: Pamela Potier with Samantha Wang and Delaney Sebora



Right: Daisy Mae Hunter



Left: Harrison King

Right: Cat Island map sourced from Ontheworldmap.com



Oral Histories

Oral histories work to preserve the cultural knowledge and ancestry of Cat Island's residents, bridging gaps left by traditional historical records.

"Well I read. I talk to the elders. I sit at their feet. And I ask questions." *Pamela Potier*

"I learned part of my family history from [...] some of my older persons. That's how I learned it, from them. And so whatever they instill in me, I can pass on to my children, or some of my other siblings or family, I can pass down to them." *Daisy Mae Hunter*



Christopher Stubbs chopping a coconut with his machete



Pothole farming at the Cleare Farm

Living With the Land

Instead of exploiting the land for mass production, Cat Island residents live reciprocally with their land through sustainable farming, like **pothole farming**, and **bush medicine**.

"Bush medicine, I come about doing medicine through my old family ancestors and the older ones in the community. So I usually like go around to older people and talk with them and see them using different bushes for different things." *Daisy Mae Hunter*

"I grow enough to eat, to sell, and to give away. [...] It's like the more I give, the more they bear. When nobody else growing, my field blossom." *Harrison King*

Combatting Colonial Narratives

In Cat Island, self-education and oral communication are essential for correcting the misinformation propped up by the colonial education system.

"When I went to school, we didn't study Bahamian history. We had to do English and American history." *Christopher Stubbs*

"I had the same experience. I could tell you everything about Shakespeare and 1066, but I didn't know no Bahamian history." *Garth King*



Garth King reading his original poetry

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What wisdom would you give to future generations of Cat Islanders?

"Go into farming."
Ivan Cleare

"Regardless of what you do in life, plant something. In order for you to have a harvest, you must have a seed."
Harrison King

"Come together."
Bloneva Hunter

"Invest in agriculture."
Horace Forbes

"We should all move blindly and just become the person that is easy to amuse and impossible to offend."
Jamaal Moncur

"That they try to find out more about their history."
Christopher Stubbs

"Don't just depend on the modern world."
Daisy Mae Hunter

"Learn how to cultivate something."
Ian Cleare

"Whatever you're into, don't forget you're a Black man and the world needs you."
Garth King

"Know where you came from, then you know where you're going[...] Stop looking outside of you for you."
Pamela Poitier