



From the Pages of @AfricatownSea: The Story of the Original Africatown

Posted by [Africatown](#) | 25 - Aug - 2021

The Story of the Original Africatown

When the descendants of the Clotilda slave ship were emancipated at the end of the Civil War in 1865, they wanted to return to Africa.

Their homeland was fresh in their memory, but it soon became clear that they didn't have the resources to return. They pooled their wages from working on nearby plantations and purchased land to establish Africatown, a community complete with its own legal system, schools and chief.

In 1860, only five years earlier, the Clotilda had made an illegal voyage, smuggling 124 captives sold by the Kingdom of Dahomey for \$100 each. 109 of them made it to the shores of Alabama.

The ship returned to Mobile Bay secretly, under cover of darkness, to hand over the captives to the Maeher Family Plantation. It was the last known slave ship to disembark from the United States.

Upon return, the vessel was promptly set on fire and sunk in the swamp to hide the evidence.

Until recently, the story of Africatown's founding has been considered unverifiable folklore by outside historians. Descendants of the Clotilda, like **Cudjoe Lewis** whose history was chronicled through interviews with **Zora Neale Hurston** in the book, , were often not believed as they exposed the previously untold history of the international slave trade continuing long after it had been declared illegal in 1808.

200 years later, descendants of the Clotilda and other Black residents who have joined the Africatown community over the centuries have been plagued by the same economic disinvestment and environmental racism faced by Black communities all over the United States.

The same Maeher Family that financed the Clotilda slave ship owns land in the community that is home to an abandoned paper mill, chemical plants and oil storage tanks that pollute the soil and waterways at up to 3000 times the levels deemed safe by the **World Health Organization**. The **US Environmental Protection Agency** has granted Mobile \$300,000 to assess the extent of the contamination in the community as the first step towards cleaning and revitalizing Africatown.

Now, with the recent, ground-breaking discovery of the wreckage of the Clotilda in 2019, the oral history passed down by its descendants has been validated and the community seeks to revitalize with new found purpose to share its history.

Africatown, Mobile welcomes visitors from across the country and around the world and encourages those with ancestors from Alabama to investigate their lineage for connections to the community.

In a powerful episode of Finding Your Roots, Hip Hop pioneer DJ Questlove traced his own heritage back to the Clotilda and was promptly invited to make a visit. Meanwhile, Africatown Mobiles residents are taking action to develop the community, which is now a landmark on the National Register of Historic Places. In February 2021, the residents broke ground on the site of the Africatown Heritage House, the future home of the Clotilda and Africatown artifacts. State and national funds have been allocated to build a waterfront park and the Africatown Welcome Center is scheduled to open in fall of 2021.

Copyright © 2021 africatownseattle.com. All rights reserved.