From Past to Present:
Heritage as an Avenue to Contemporary Social Concerns
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Grasping with Inequality: Race Haunting the Region
For the recent past of Sarasota/Manatee, Race haunts history. Archaeological investigations for the location of an early 19th century maroon community (Baram 2008), historic preservation of a segregation-era Black cemetery (Baram 2012), and recognition that a train depot was constructed to divide (Baram 2011), are reminders that “…the effort to speak about issues of ‘space and location’ evoke pain” (bell hooks 1990). While painful, historicized Race is a weapon against racism; to quote Ta-Nehisi Coates (2013:7): “Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism – the need to ascribe home-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them – inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of man.” By interpreting the many histories for a place, undergraduate participation in the heritage projects offers insights into survival and successes even under challenging conditions. Heritage can divide people, or can engage community inclusion through cosmopolitan canopies (Baram forthcoming) where differences can be encountered and can flourish. For the undergraduates, involvement in such projects, whether in excavating, documenting, or interpretation the past, provides an avenue where they can grapple with community identities, contemporary politics, and commemoration.

Outreach programs, exhibits, and site tours: explaining the past and seeing places as having many histories, to encourage a cosmopolitan canopy where differences are appreciated and celebrated

References:
Baram, Uzi 2012 “Heritage as an Avenue to Contemporary Social Concerns. Heritage Interpretation on campus and across the region.”:

Student Assessment
The projects in regional heritage have been wide-ranging. Student responses, collected with IRB approval, include:

“I found each aspect of work that I undertook for this project extremely rewarding and it provided a very unique workload that I would not have necessarily gotten during the course of my academic career.” (Kevin Cigala, Spring 2014)

“….made me realize how challenging historic preservation can be. It requires a lot of research and creative thinking about how to target specific audiences. It also requires a balance between allowing present day uses of places and honoring the influence of the past on the space.” (Ijeoma Uzoukwu, Spring 2014)

“I know that the students, including myself, were all terribly nervous… However, once we were at the site, …our ability to connect with a certain set of facts or emotions, made us more enthusiastic about sharing that information with visitors.” (Jodi Johnson, Fall 2013)