

# 2010 SUMMER RESEARCH EXPERIENCE FOR UNDERGRADUATES (REU) Ethnohistorical Study of the Community of Nicodemus, Kansas



## USF'S REU PROGRAM

Under the direction of Dr. Antoinette Jackson of the USF Department of Anthropology, the Heritage Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) Program entitled, **Heritage Research USA**, was designed to help prepare participants to study emergent social-cultural research and resource management issues faced by communities interested in heritage as a key cultural resource in areas such as quality of life programs and policies; education; tourism; historic preservation; youth activities; civic and environmental empowerment; and neighborhood revitalization. It is conducted in collaboration with local community groups, the National Park Service, the USF Department of Anthropology Heritage Research Lab, the Office of Community Engagement, and the Office of Undergraduate Research.

## THE HERITAGE REU IN NICODEMUS, KANSAS

Nicodemus, Kansas is one of the first settlements and amongst the few remaining communities founded by African American former slaves post-Civil War west of the Mississippi River. The town was founded by settlers originating from approximately 7 families from Kentucky. Since its creation, the spirit of the Nicodemus community has persevered, and with the establishment of the Nicodemus National Historic Site by the National Park Service in 1996, Nicodemus has secured a lasting presence as a place deemed important to the history of America. The Nicodemus Heritage REU Specifically, this project was conducted in collaboration with Ms. Angela Bates, President of the Nicodemus Historical Society as part of an agreement between the National Park Service and the University of South Florida (grant number H5000085095-J6068090024). An analysis of the Nicodemus community—both past and present—was conducted through specific research projects and presentations prepared by USF graduate and undergraduate student researchers as part of this program under the direction of Project PI, Dr. Antoinette Jackson.



## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### 1.) Background Research Trips to Heritage Sites in Russell Springs, Stockton and Speed, Kansas

In order to explore the larger context of the American Westward expansion story as it pertains to Nicodemus, the REU team traveled to several satellite communities and homesteads in Kansas where there was significant settlement of African Americans. On these trips, REU team members worked with local Nicodemus residents to learn about frontier life in Kansas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.



REU Team Members (L to R): Cassandra Lawhon, Richard Titus, Dr. Antoinette Jackson, Cassandra Lubbers, and Blaze Buck at the remains of a 19<sup>th</sup> century dugout outside of Stockton, Kansas

### 2.) Interview Training Workshop for Nicodemus Residents and Descendants



The REU team assisted Dr. Antoinette Jackson with an Oral History Workshop, where they helped train Nicodemus community residents and descendants about how to conduct interviews with their respective families for the Nicodemus Oral History Project. This workshop informed residents about many skills, including how to use certain interview strategies, how to distribute and follow Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms and guidelines, as well as how to handle digital recorders and manage digital audio files.

**For more information, contact: Dr. Antoinette Jackson – Department of Anthropology –  
Heritage Research and Resource Management Lab – University of South Florida – 4202 Fowler Ave., SOC 107 –  
Tampa, FL 33620-8100. Phone – (813) 974-6882. Fax – (813) 974-2668. Email – [atjackson@usf.edu](mailto:atjackson@usf.edu)**



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### 3.) Archival and Bibliographic Research

Each REU team member was assigned a specific Nicodemus family group to conduct archival research on. The REU team traveled to local courthouses, county archival depositories, and to the Nicodemus Historical Society to conduct their research. After assembling profiles of each assigned family, the REU team presented their findings to members of the Nicodemus community.



### 4.) Interviews with Nicodemus residents and descendants

Students on the REU team were given the opportunity to contribute to the Oral History Project by conducting interviews of their own with local residents, and were also given tours of family homesteads by residents of the Nicodemus township.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This ethnographic profile is the result of research done as part of a six week course in heritage research and preservation entitled, *Researching American Culture*. It is based on fieldwork and archival research conducted as part of the Heritage USA REU Summer 2010 program at the University of South Florida. The course examines issues associated with conducting ethnographic fieldwork and analysis in an American cultural setting and asks what is American culture and how do we conduct research in an American cultural context.