Seeking Sanctuary – St. Augustine & **Santa Teresa de Mose**
Written by the National Park Service
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A Different View
The institution of slavery in Spain was different from that of other European nations. Spanish slave laws, granting enslaved people certain rights and protections, were derived from ancient Roman traditions and had been incorporated into the Castilian code of law known as the Siete Partidas in the thirteenth century. These laws were not based on race, and Africans joined slaves of other races and ethnicities who had been captured in "just wars," been condemned, or had sold themselves into slavery. The Siete Partidas held that slavery was an unnatural condition, for God had created man free, and it established ways in which enslaved people could become free.

This philosophy was held in the context of a country steeped in the Catholic religion. All men, both free and enslaved, were brothers in Christ, and it was the responsibility of masters and the Church to teach them the rudiments of the faith so that they might be admitted into the Church and enjoy all its sacraments. Since these sacraments include marriage, the sanctity of the family was protected by requirements that family members not be separated. Brotherhood in the Church sometimes served to tie enslaved people to those who owned them in intricate kinship arrangements, such as owner serving as godparents and marriage sponsors.

As Spaniards conquered and colonized in the Americas, they were charged with a dual purpose: to bring wealth to the Spanish Crown, and to bring souls to the Catholic Church. They established mission systems across all the lands they claimed, Christianizing the Native Americans and creating an extensive network of farms and information-gathering sources in the process. Africans both free and enslaved were part of Spanish armed forces both in Europe and in their first expeditions across the Atlantic.

Africans Come to Florida
When Pedro Menéndez de Avilés established St. Augustine in 1565, he was accompanied by free and enslaved Africans. They worked on early fortifications, sawed timber, and built several structures, including a church, a blacksmith shop, and an artillery platform. They also cleared land for planting and harvested the crops.

In October 1687, the first recorded fugitive slaves from Carolina arrived in St. Augustine. Governor Diego de Quiroga dutifully reported to Spain that eight men, two women, and a three-year-old nursing child had made good their escape in a boat. Six of the men were put to work on the new Castillo de San Marcos, but two others were assigned to work with the blacksmith, a possible indication that they already had skills in that area. The women became domestics in the house of the governor. All were reportedly paid for their labor.

When an English official arrived the next fall to claim them, Governor Quiroga refused to release them on the grounds that they had been converted to Catholicism, had married in the town, and were usefully employed. Thus a fugitive slave policy began to evolve in the Florida colony. In 1693, King Charles II issued the first official position on the runaways, "giving liberty to all…the men as well as the women…so that by their example and by my liberality others will do the same."

A Free Black Town
In the decades following the king's decree, many more enslaved Africans escaped from the Carolinas and found refuge in Spanish Florida, prompting additional royal decrees in 1733 reinforcing the offer of freedom, prohibiting the reimbursement of the English for escaped slaves, and requiring four years of service to the Crown in order to become free. So many freedom seekers came to Florida that in 1738, Governor Manuel de Montiano granted them a plot of land about two miles north of St. Augustine where they could build their own settlement and fort. The people became Catholics and adopted Spanish names and Spanish culture with an African flavor. This settlement, Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, or Fort Mose, (mo-say) became the first legally-established free African settlement in North America.

The original fort was described as an earthen-walled fort with Indian-type thatched huts. The community housed thirty-eight men and their families with an estimated population of about one hundred people. The men were required to serve in the militia, and the would be called on to defend St. Augustine in times of attack. A Spanish officer was nominally in charge of the settlement, but the militia captain, an African veteran of the 1715 Yamasee Wars named Francisco Menéndez, was truly the community's leader.

When British forces from Georgia attacked St. Augustine in 1740, Montiano ordered the people of Mose to abandon their settlement and fall back to St. Augustine for safety. Fort Mose was captured by the British and used as a base of operations; Spanish soldiers and the Mose militia regained it in a suprise attack that devastated the British forces, but the fort was destroyed. Over the next decade, the people of Mose lived within the community of St. Augustine, until Governor García de Solís insisted they return and rebuild the settlement in 1752. When Florida was transferred to British hands by treaty in 1763, these African settlers evacuated to Cuba with the rest of the Spanish from St. Augustine.

Although there are no remains of Fort Mose's earth and wooden structures, visitors today can view the land where the settlement once stood at Fort Mose Historic State Park. There is an interactive museum at the site and special events throughout the year hosted by the Fort Mose Historical Society. Fort Mose is also part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

Social Position
While slavery in the Spanish colonies was considered an accident of fate rather than a perpetual or preordained condition, and Spanish slave code and social practice made it possible for a significant free Black class to exist in both Spain and the New World, Blacks were not free

from racial prejudice. When the Moors, who had ruled Spain for seven centuries, were driven out in 1492, those who remained were relegated to the bottom of the social status. This was to remain the norm for centuries, although a person could climb the social ladder through marriage, the accumulation of wealth, military service, or the sponsorship of a person of higher status.

Although the majority of Africans married others of African descent, a number of them married white Europeans, Native Americans, and mixed-blood spouses, and a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society developed throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. The Spanish developed a highly organized system for identifying the precise genetic heritage of an individual. Full-blood Africans were known as morenos. People of mixed African-European-Indian ancestry were known as castas, with other nomenclature depending on their heritage. For example, if a Spaniard married a morena woman, their children would be mulattos. If a mulatto married a Spaniard, their children would be known as moriscos. The children of Spaniards and Native Americans were called mestizos.

Africans in the Military
One place where a person of lesser status could succeed, regardless of color, was in the military. Africans served in their own units under their own officers. There were black militia units almost everywhere the Spanish had colonies, and their European military units were multicultural as well.

In Florida, Black inhabitants formed themselves into a militia at least as early as 1683. Black troops from Vera Cruz and Havana served in Florida during the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1742). During the American Revolution, Black Havana troops under Spanish Louisiana governor Bernardo de Gálvez successfully attacked the British at Baton Rouge, Manchac, Mobile, and Pensacola.

According to St. Augustine historian Dr. Susan Parker, the Fort Mose militia was routinely stationed at the Francisco Redoubt, the southeastern-most cannon platform along the earthen city walls. It is possible that they were also rotated as a group to Fort Matanzas on occasion. One of the soldiers present at the last muster held at Fort Matanzas, five days before the formal transfer to the US in 1821, was Sergeant 2nd Class Lorenzo Brito of the Colored Company of Havana.

Free Blacks had a vested interest in serving in the Florida military. After all, if Florida fell to the British, they would be enslaved. But even enslaved men were willing to serve, because military service was one possible route to obtain freedom.

Changing Times
In 1821, the Adams-Onís Treaty ceded Florida to the United States. Although this treaty recognized the rights of free persons of color, most of the Black militia and their families moved to Cuba, as their predecessors had done in 1763 when the colony had transferred to British

hands. Only those who felt themselves protected by owning substantial property stayed in the new U.S. territory.

However, laws were soon passed infringing on the rights of freedmen. Laws limited the right of free African Americans to assemble, carry firearms, serve on juries, or testify against whites. They were taxed unfairly and subject to curfews. They could be whipped for misdemeanors, impressed for manual labor, and even forced back into slavery to satisfy debts or fines. Interracial marriage was prohibited, and the children of such previous marriages could not inherit their parents' estates. Under such restrictions, more mixed-race families, such as the Kingsleys of Fort George Island, evacuated Florida.

Some free African Americans who ran afoul of these restrictive laws ran away to live with the Seminoles. Those who could afford it immigrated to other Caribbean countries. Although by 1850, it is estimated that about 1000 free blacks remained in Florida (compared to 39,000 enslaved). Learn more about African American history from 1821 to present-day.

Timeline
1513: Africans arrive in Florida with Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León, the first European to lay claim to Florida.

September 8, 1565: St. Augustine is founded nearly a half century before Jamestown by Don Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, who arrived from Spain with 800 colonists including approximately 50 Africans, both free and enslaved. The Africans brought by Menéndez become an integral part of America's first colony.

1595: The first recorded African American child is born in St. Augustine.

1598: The first recorded African American marriage takes place in St. Augustine.

1672: Construction of the Castillo de San Marcos begins. Enslaved African Americans make up a small percentage of of the workforce.

1687: Eleven enslaved Africans – eight men, two women and a nursing child – escape from the Carolinas and arrive in St. Augustine. Governor Quiroga grants their request for sanctuary, sees them baptized in the Catholic Church, and hires the men as paid labor at the Castillo de San Marcos. He also refuses British demands to return the escapees.

1693: Spanish King Charles II issues a royal decree granting freedom and protection to all enslaved Africans escaping British colonies, as long as they convert to Catholicism and serve Spain.

1695: The construction of the Castillo de San Marcos is complete. Payroll records show that eleven Africans worked as paid labor.

1726: Florida governor Antonio de Benavides establishes the first African American slave militia.

1738: Governor Manuel de Montiano establishes Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, commonly known as Fort Mose, the first free African American settlement in what's now the United States. Francisco Menéndez, a Mandigo man formerly enlsaved by the British, is appointed captain of Fort Mose's free Black militia.

1740: As part of a larger international conflict between Spain and Great Britain, General James Oglethorpe lays siege to St. Augustine with British forces. His troops capture Fort Mose, forcing the inhabitants to relocate to St. Augustine.

1759: Fort Mose is rebuilt by African Americans; 67 residents live in 22 houses.

1763: Great Britain claim Florida through the treaty that ends the French & Indian War. Nearly all of St. Augustine's residents, including the Fort Mose community, relocate to Cuba. Fort Mose is abandonded permanently.

1776: The Declaration of Independence declares that "all men are created equal" while rejecting anti-slavery language to win Southern support for the American Revolution. St. Augustine's British subjects burn the Declaration along with effigies of John Adams and John Hancock.

1783: The American Revolution comes to an end with a treaty that allows the Spanish to reclaim Florida from the British.

1787: The United States Constitution is enacted, officially recognizing slavery by counting enslaved people as 3/5 of a person to determine the number of Congressional seats. This action gives the Southern states great political power based on non-voting enslaved populations.

1790: U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson pressures the Spanish to end religious sanctuary for freedom seekers. At this time in the second Spanish period, 1/5 of the African American population in Florida is free.

1793: The United States Fugitive Slave Act is passed, requiring return of all escaped slaves.

1796: Jorge Biassou, a leader in the Haitian slave revolt in the early 1790s and a Spanish General of African descent, arrives to St. Augustine and lives in a home on St. George Street.

1812: During the War of 1812, the Spanish Crown rewards the Black militia with land grants for protecting St. Augustine.

1821: Florida becomes a United States territory, causing a major setback for African Americans and their descendants, eliminating basic civil and human rights that had been recognized by the Spanish government.