



## Archaeology for the Next Generation

### *Association of Black Anthropologists*

Alicia Odewale, Justin Dunnivant, Ayana Flewellen, and Alexandra Jones

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The [Society of Black Archaeologists \(SBA\)](#), founded in 2011, represents the only professional organization that focuses on specifically addressing the concerns of black archaeologists and, more generally, scholars of African descent across the diaspora. Today, the exact number of African Americans employed as archaeologists in America is unknown. Our best estimates can be gleaned from the [three needs assessments](#) conducted by the Society of American Archaeology since 2003. Using this data as a proxy, the percentage of people who identify as African American has remained at less than 1 percent of the total number of American archaeologists, growing at the slow pace of 0.1 percent roughly every five years (Table 1). From this data, it is clear that two decades since [Professor Maria Franklin asked, “Why Are There So Few Black American Archaeologists?”](#) we still have a long way to go for proportionate representation in the field. The work of SBA and other collaborative organizations like the American Anthropological Association’s [Association of Black Anthropologists \(ABA\)](#) and the Society of Historical Archaeology’s [Gender and Minority Affairs Committee \(GMAC\)](#) have been a driving force behind what progress has been made in encouraging African Americans, many of whom research sites of African and African diaspora heritage, to enter the field.

Year	Total Respondents	Percent Identifying as African-American
2003	1355	0.1%
2010	3021	0.2%
2015	2521	0.3%

**Table 1. Self-reported race of respondents from 2003, 2010, and 2015 SAA Needs Assessment Survey.** Table created by authors.

On the island of St. Croix, of the US Virgin Islands, a rich body of cultural resources pertaining to Amerindian, Crucian, African, and Afro-Caribbean heritage exists, but few of the archaeologists who are native to the Virgin Islands identify as Black or Afro-Caribbean. The best estimate of the total number of archaeologists working in the Virgin Islands comes from the [International Association for Caribbean Archaeology \(IACA\)](#). They account for fourteen members currently leading archaeology research projects in the Virgin Islands. Only one of these is native to the Virgin Islands and only one specializes in sites of African heritage and self-identifies as Black or Afro-Caribbean.

In addition to the paucity of minority archaeologists who are native Virgin Islanders, there are no academic programs on the island that offer training in archaeological research related to African heritage. The University of the Virgin Islands offers some programming in Caribbean Cultural Studies but to date no programs that would lead to a career in archaeology for students native to these islands. Thus, in the summer of 2017, the authors and collaborative partners from SBA, [Diving with a Purpose](#), the [Nature Conservancy](#), [Slave Wrecks Project](#), [St. Croix Boys and Girls Club](#), and [Junior Scientists in the Sea](#) teamed up to offer a solution.



**The Estate Little Princess Archaeological Field School co-creators.**  
From left to right: **Alicia Odewale, Ayana Flewellen, Alexandra Jones, Justin Dunnivant.** Alicia Odewale

In June 2017, SBA co-founders, [Justin Dunnivant](#) and [Ayana Flewellen](#) joined together with [Alicia Odewale](#) and [Alexandra Jones](#) to launch the [Estate Little Princess Archaeological Field School](#). This program is the first field school of its kind to be directed by a team of African American archaeologists under the umbrella of the Society of Black Archaeologists. The field school used archaeology to explore the experiences of the enslaved community who lived and labored at the Estate Little Princess, a local historic sugar estate. The field school had three overall objectives: to

expose local Crucian students to career opportunities in archaeology and develop skills transferrable to various STEM fields; to allow the students to leverage this archaeological training in excavation, survey, and artifact processing as a tool to become active stakeholders and possibly pursue advanced training and education in field; and to increase the level of cultural stewardship across the island by encouraging youth to explore the past material lives of individuals within the African Diaspora. There is no fee to participate. Removing the cost increases student and community access to archaeological training. It also democratizes the ownership of archaeological knowledge and rights to participate, reaching beyond the traditional circles of patrons whose money or connections to archaeologists have allowed them to join field school expeditions.



**Aerial view of one-room duplex structures 2 and 3, as well as excavation units 3 through 5 at Estate Little Princess.** Justin Dunnavant

The Estate Little Princess represents one of the oldest and best-preserved sugar plantations on the island. Its extensive occupation record spans over 200 years, making this site an ideal candidate for examining the rise and fall of sugar production and the dynamic lifeways of enslaved peoples in St. Croix during the era of Danish Colonization. The surviving historic structures place this site in a unique category, simultaneously representing a common plantation type in St. Croix—rural sugar plantations less than 50 acres in size—while providing one of the only surviving examples of domestic structures from an entire enslaved village. Historic records indicate the presence of at least thirty, one-room duplex homes in the enslaved laborers' village at the height of the plantation's operation. During excavations, we cleared two of these structures but we are not sure how many of these structures still exist—no doubt that will remain a question for researchers to explore long into the future. Currently, we are interested in researching architectural changes through time, site formation processes, and the reasons behind its remarkable preservation.

*In our efforts to help foster the next generation of archaeologists, we have worked to build diversity and sustainable community engagement into our research.*

Research potential aside, what makes this site such a good candidate to host an archaeological field school is the potential to connect the past and the present. With 2017 marking the centennial transfer of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States, cultural politics regarding identity, representations of the past, and heritage are at the forefront of public dialogue across the territories. Records indicate that the homes identified within the enslaved laborers' village were occupied well into the 1960s after the plantation fell into disrepair. There are many people on the island today who share a connection to the estate either through parents or grandparents who lived at the site through this period. Students can be part of uncovering the remnants of modern trash from squatters, trash from 1960s occupants, and the pre-emancipation material culture of the site, while engaging with living descendants of this past community and diving into their own Crucian heritage in the process. The field school allows students to see themselves in this archaeological heritage process and gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural and natural resources of St. Croix. Through our work, Crucian youth are able to relate present-day practices to the foodways, architecture and building materials, healing practices, as well as social and economic networks used by the enslaved community of the Estate Little Princess.

This innovative field school program centralizes community engagement with the goal of not only including local communities in the design, implementation, and dissemination of the research but training local youth in archaeology and heritage management. Thus, it serves to address our central concern of fostering a new generation of cultural stewards. The Estate Little Princess field school is more than just a research site: it is a training ground for future archaeologists and heritage professionals. In addition to training Crucian youth through the Boys and Girls Club, we are taking a more active role in hosting university students from the University of the Virgin Islands and Howard University through collaborations with professors at these institutions.



**The Estate Little Princess Archaeological Field School excavation team and student participants.** Alicia Odewale

We understand the importance of engaging students at all stages of the educational pipeline to develop cohorts. In the coming years, we want to foster an environment where high school students are learning from undergraduates and undergraduates are learning from graduate students. We also understand that many of these students will not pursue professional careers in archaeology. Either way, they will have a better understanding and appreciation for the cultural and natural environments in which they live. The survey, excavation, analysis, and diving skills the students learn as part of the training have practical applications in other disciplines and careers.

The field school is still in its nascent stages and we continue to learn what curriculum and programs the students find effective and what aspects of the program can be improved. If the program proves successful in training local archaeologists over the long-term, the model can be developed at other archaeology sites as a means of developing local heritage professionals. In our efforts to help foster the next generation of archaeologists, we have worked to build diversity and sustainable community engagement into our research. We only hope that this program is the start of many, so the invitation to join the field reaches more than a few diverse scholars in the next generation.

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**Justin Dunnavant** is a UC President's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

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**Alexandra Jones** is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Archaeology in the Community.

Contributions to the ABA Section News column can be sent to **Michelle Munyikwa** at [munyikwa@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:munyikwa@sas.upenn.edu) for review.

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