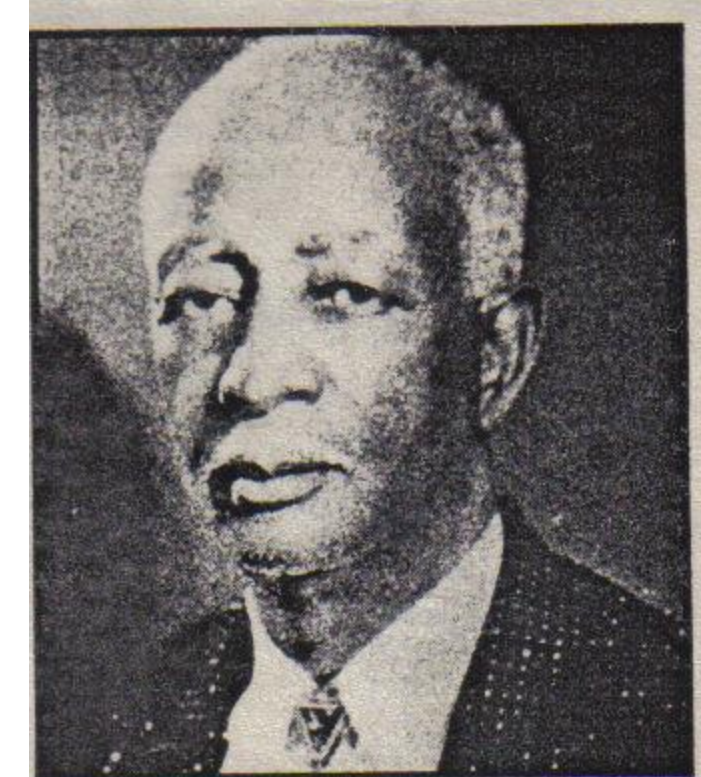


Sounding Out Sistrunk: A Historical Listening & Archival Collaboration with OTOWN

Preserving Community Memory as a Legacy of Place



Da'Mya Bray; Professor Christell V. Roach



Dr. James Franklin Sistrunk



Dr. Von Mizell

The Roots of Sistrunk

Sistrunk is Fort Lauderdale's oldest Black community and a cornerstone of South Florida's cultural and historical foundation. Named after Dr. James Franklin Sistrunk, a pioneering African American physician who moved to the area in 1922, the community reflects a legacy of resilience and unity. Dr. Sistrunk co-founded Provident Hospital with Dr. Von D. Mizell, establishing Broward County's first Black medical facility to serve patients excluded from white hospitals. Over his 44-year career, he dedicated himself to the community, which is honored today through the annual Sistrunk Historical Festival. Despite its significance, much of Sistrunk's history remains undocumented as longtime residents age and records are lost.

Introduction

The Sistrunk community holds a rich and significant place in the cultural and historical foundation of South Florida. Historically recognized as a landmark of African American life, culture, and economic activity, the Sistrunk area has served as a space for community building, resilience, and shared identity. Despite its importance, much of the history of the Sistrunk community remains undocumented or forgotten as longtime residents age and physical records become lost.

As the redevelopment and generational shifts continue to transform the area, the lived experiences, traditions, and stories of Sistrunk residents face the risk of disappearing. Preserving this history is essential not only to honor the community's legacy but also to provide future generations with a deeper understanding of the social and cultural contributions of the Sistrunk community. This research project seeks to preserve the history of the Sistrunk community by collecting oral histories, archival materials, and community narratives in order to document and protect the voices and experiences that have shaped the community.



Provident Hospital, 1938
First black medical facility in Broward.



Victory Theatre
(Movie theatre for African Americans)

Abstract

The Sistrunk community stands as a foundational pillar of African American culture and economic resilience in South Florida. However, as the neighborhood undergoes rapid redevelopment and its eldest generation passes on, the community's undocumented histories and cultural traditions face the imminent risk of erasure. This research project addresses this critical gap by documenting the lived experiences, social landmarks, and institutional histories of Sistrunk. Utilizing a community-based methodology, the study centers oral history interviews with prominent community leaders and longtime residents, alongside the curation of rare archival materials—including photographs and private records—from local institutions like Dillard High School. The significance of cultural memory emerges as a key finding that aids with reconstructing historical narratives, a method often dismissed or disregarded by traditional academic disciplines. Key findings emphasize the significance of first-hand accounts and community memory in reconstructing historical narratives often overlooked by traditional academic records. The project culminates in a multi-platform preservation effort, including a written report, a digital archive, and an interactive presence on the OTOWN app. By bridging the gap between past and present, this study not only honors the Sistrunk legacy but also provides a replicable model for grassroots historical preservation that ensures historically Black communities can preserve their cultural memory, assert narrative agency, and sustain intergenerational knowledge within the broader African American diaspora. The significance of cultural memory emerges as a key finding that aids with reconstructing historical narratives, a method often dismissed or disregarded by traditional academic disciplines.

Research Question

- What stories, traditions, and lived experiences define the identity of the Sistrunk community?

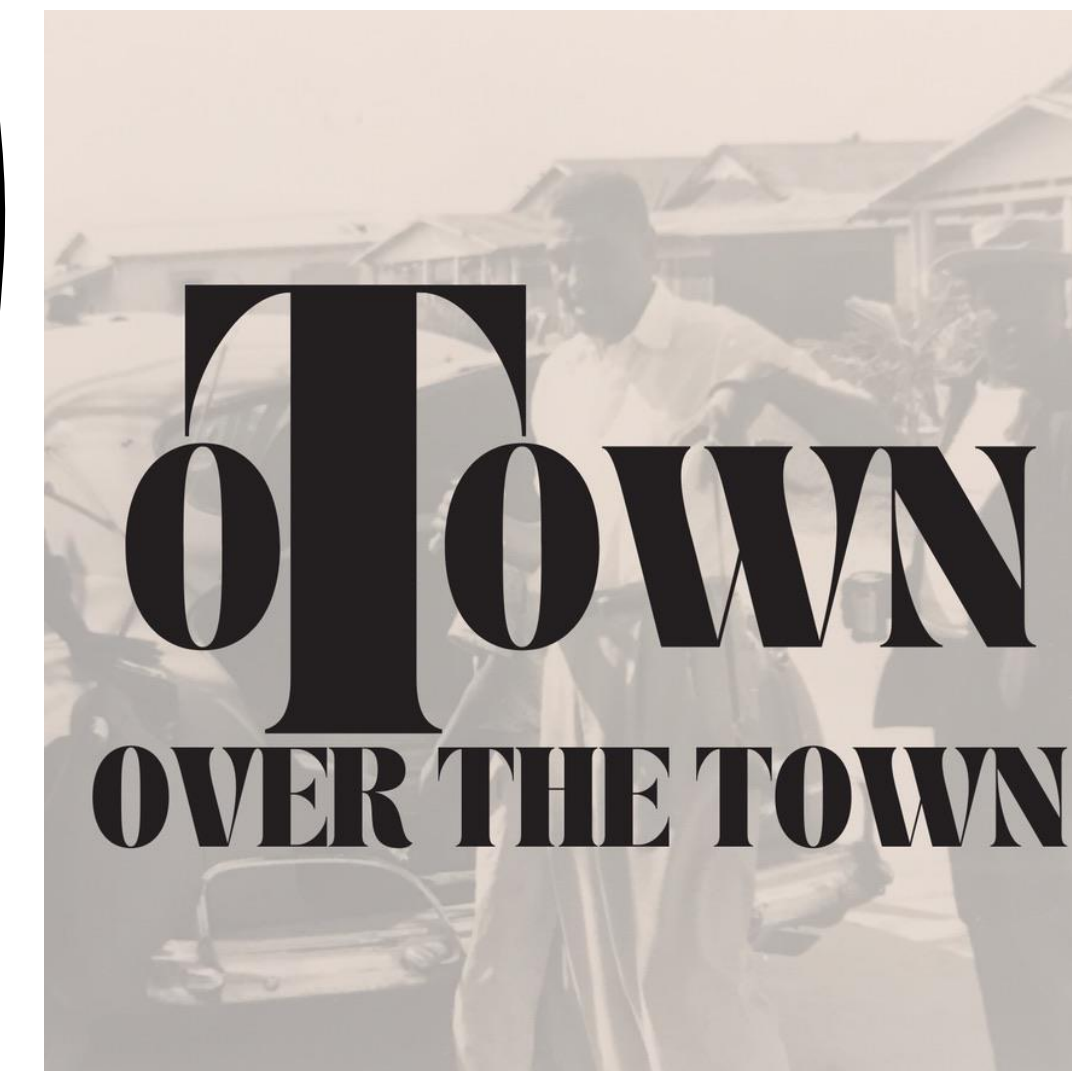


Dillard High Economics Class in the 1930s.

Methodology

Grounded in an intergenerational model of archival engagement, this research engages the *living archive* of Dr. Mistoria Brown, a community elder, as we access Sistrunk through her memories — building a multimodal archive through oral history, archival photography, and site-based documentation. This research presents a curated, interactive exhibit engaging Sistrunk as a *landscape of historical memory*. Ultimately, *Sounding out Sistrunk*, follows the model of *Ninth St., My Street*, OTOWN's inaugural exhibit & framework, in a restorative, intergenerational, relationship-building model of engagement with community history via the archive, storytelling, and community collaboration. Community members contributed archival materials, including photographs, documents, records, and personal ephemera. This collaboration strengthened the depth and accuracy of the research by incorporating first-hand accounts and trusted community sources.

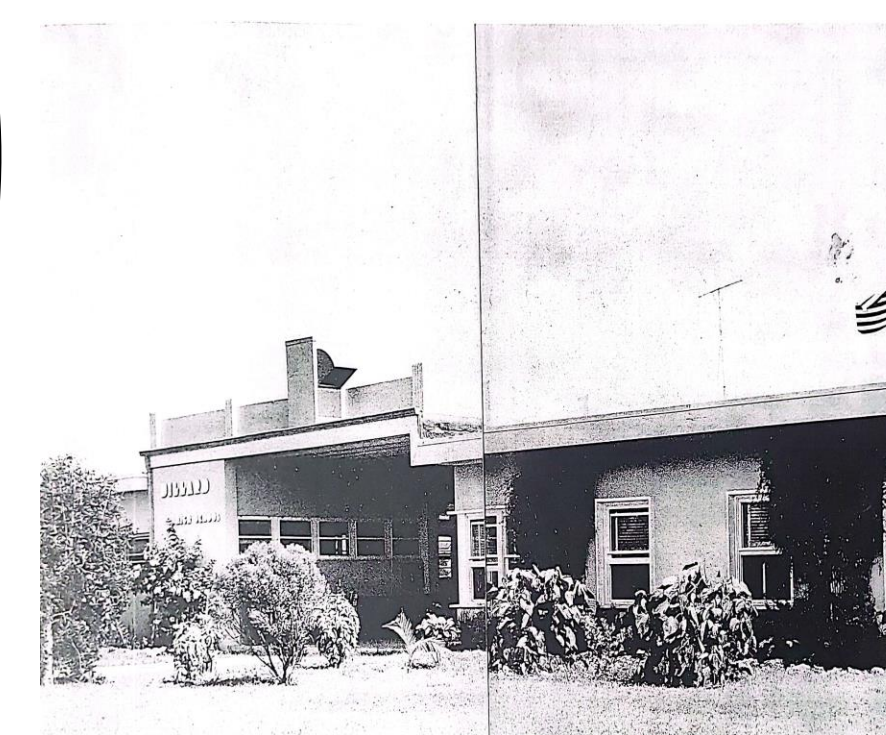
Expected Outcomes



This project applies the OTOWN digital humanities framework, which maps and embeds community memory through site-specific storytelling.

Through this digital archiving app, "Sounding Out Sistrunk" will contribute to a geo-located installation using the OTOWN model developed by Christell Victoria Roach. This location-specific exhibit will remain a digital monument for years to come.

Conclusion



Dillard High School in the late 1950s.

Preserving the history of the Sistrunk community is an essential step in honoring the voices, experiences, and cultural contributions of its residents. Through archival research, this project seeks to document the stories that might otherwise be lost or forgotten. By creating a lasting record of the Sistrunk community history, this research contributes to a broader understanding of local African American heritage and ensures that the community legacy continues to be remembered and valued.


Why Preservation Matters



By preserving the stories and experiences of Sistrunk residents through oral history, we create a method of relationship building that builds community legacy. Presenting these narratives in a curated immersive experience anchored in a place, transforms the Sistrunk community's collective relationship with its history by prioritizing access and proximity.

Newspaper highlighting Dillard High School's big football game in 1948.

References/Acknowledgements

To follow my research development, you can visit www.cvrpoet.com/OTOWN where you will find my historical research, archival materials, and references. Or, you can scan this QR code to access:  *Sounding Out Sistrunk* — my project page for the OTOWN : Sistrunk research site.

This research project would not have been possible without the guidance and support of Dr. Mistoria Brown and Professor Christell Victoria Roach, who have shared invaluable knowledge and insight about Black South Florida.

Voices of Sistrunk

"Sistrunk is built on family." - Dr. Mistoria Brown

"Let us join hands in training the Negro youth to have respect to have respect for Fort Lauderdale, for idealism, for lawful obedience, for faithful service, for building up civic pride and friendship between races."

- Professor Clarence C. Walker

"These are some fine children here. They are literally lifting themselves out of the mud by their own bootstraps. They are worthy of every facility that can be offered them. We like to criticize them for their wrong doing but the wonder to me is that they have done as well as they have." -Professor Clarence C. Walker

