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African American History In Gadsden County

The history of Gadsden County is complex and relates to the labor of African Americans. From the inception and beyond the Reconstruction Era through the Jim Crow laws and up to recent times, African Americans have played critical roles in the building and carrying on of this entire nation. This is evident in agriculture, business, professional services, and crafts. Furthermore, we see terms like "negro", "mulatto", and "colored" to describe African Americans, which reflect a changing significance in heritage and identity. The essay will discuss some of the labor achievements of African Americans in Gadsden County and examine the importance of the changing nomenclature affecting African American identity.

Agriculture remains one of the greatest laboring contributions of African Americans to the Gadsden economy. African Americans worked on plantations and farms during most of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Cash crops such as tobacco, corn, and cotton were grown and harvested, with shade-grown tobacco being of particular fame in Gadsden County. It continued beyond the year 1865, when slavery was abolished. Black laborers retained their presence in agriculture as sharecroppers and tenant farmers, usually under harsh conditions. Many African Americans, despite the tough conditions, showed considerable bravery and resilience. Some of these laborers did become owners of land, thus cultivating their own independent farms. This transition was a major breakthrough and a crucial step toward financial independence for African

Americans. They would support each other, therefore laying a very huge foundation for future generations in Gadsden County.

Aside from agriculture, there have been many successes that African Americans have achieved and continue to do so-some have set up businesses of their own. The work of tailors, brick layers, and blacksmiths earned vital services in Gadsden's growth. The businesses that Black people established, such as barber shops and restaurants, were important community places for the entire African American community. Those businesses were not only selling goods and services; they also built cultural pride and economic independence.

One major way African Americans engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Gadsden County was in cigar-making. I have previously spoken about the immense success of shade-grown tobacco from Gadsden County, and the making of cigars was one avenue of realization from that. Cigar making required skilled handiwork, which many skilled African American workers became highly competent in. This would eventually lead to some small cigar establishments being started by Black people for the purpose of giving employment to local members of that community. Their work not only gave a foundation to future Black-owned businesses in Gadsden County as well as in the entire region.

With the advent of more opportunities for education, African Americans in Gadsden County seized careers in educational fields, medicine, and law. Within this group, teachers clearly emerge as central. Black teachers ensured that African American students received an education, even during segregation when there were not many resources. Schools such as the

prestigious Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida, became a stronghold of hope for Black students seeking professional careers and higher education.

Over the years, the terms in reference to African Americans have changed, usually reflecting different societal attitudes toward race and identity. "Negro", "Colored", "Black" and "Mulatto": these terms have been subject of cultural trajectory-shifts, political movements, and legal classification. Out of the three, "Colored" was the most common but it perpetuated a racial divide. "Mulatto" denoted a person born of mixed races. "Negro" gained popularity in the early 20th century being adopted by key figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and the NAACP in the campaign for equal rights; however, it came to be rejected in the 1960's and 70's during campaigns of black pride and black empowerment spearheaded by figures like Malcolm X and parties such as the Black Panther Party. Nowadays, "African-American" remains the term that encompasses both the heritage and nationality of Blacks.

African Americans have been significant to the economic and social development of Gadsden County. From agriculture to all sorts of professional trades and businesses, their courage and contributions have molded the community. The mutation of the racial terms serves to show us the continuous path into identity and equality. Understanding this history opens our eyes to the great contributions made by African Americans not only in Gadsden County but also the whole world.

Works Cited

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