



# GREEN SCHOOL PUBLIC HUMANITIES LAB



OCCASIONAL PAPER

## Documenting Miami's Goombay Festival and Little Bahamas of Coconut Grove



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Cover Art: A Junkanoo Rush  
during the 2023 Miami  
Goombay Festival. Photo by  
Aarti Mehta-Kroll © 2023

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## STEVEN J. GREEN SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# DOCUMENTING MIAMI'S GOOMBAY FESTIVAL AND LITTLE BAHAMAS OF COCONUT GROVE

In 2024, the Public Humanities Lab (PHL) was awarded a Community Collections Grant (CCG) from the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to document Miami's Goombay Festival and Little Bahamas of Coconut Grove. The resulting archival collection was collaboratively shaped by the contributions of volunteers, community members and an FIU team led by the PHL. This report shares how we were able to stay true to the spirit of the grant and offers lessons related to the opportunities and challenges that come with engaging communities in the co-creation of archival collections.

### Origin Story

Our idea for the Community Collections Grant (CCG) was years in the making. It began with artist and community activist Mikeya Brown, approaching PHL Director Rebecca Friedman about gathering the stories of Coconut Grove elders. With the help of Dr. Valerie Patterson of the Center for African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS), PHL Program Manager Enrique Rosell, and faculty associated with the Mellon funded Commons for Justice grant such as Dr. Marcie Washington, a team of FIU students, which included Aarti Mehta-Kroll, was recruited to play the role of interviewers. The interview questions were co-created by the FIU team in collaboration with Mikeya. Each narrator was photographed by Enrique and received both a copy of this image along with a recording of their interview.<sup>1</sup>

The positive feedback from the participants left us eager to continue engaging in community centric, non-extractive story gathering. As a result, during the 2023 Goombay Festival we interviewed festivalgoers in a collaboration with the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens.<sup>2</sup> The PHL's strong connection to the Coconut Grove community, built through this continued engagement, and its support of community events such as the showing of Jeffrey Poitier's documentary Film "Voices," made the documentation of the Goombay Festival and the neighborhood in which it takes place an obvious choice for the CCG. Our core team consisted of Dr. Rebecca Friedman, Dr. Valerie Patterson, Mikeya Brown, Enrique Rosell and Dr. Aarti Mehta-Kroll. However, we quickly grew to encompass over thirty volunteer field workers from across South Florida.

<sup>1</sup> Coconut Grove Stories: Race, Risk, Resilience – Podcast <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/coconut-grove-stories-race-risk-resilience/id1638765179>

<sup>2</sup> Goombay Coconut Grove 2023 <https://vizcaya.org/beyond-vizcaya/goombay-2023/>



## Engaging community in data collection

The documentation of the Goombay Festival was carried out in two phases. The first consisted of spending time with and interviewing members of the Goombay Festival Planning Committee to understand their strategies for keeping a nearly fifty-year-old translocal tradition alive in the face of rapid neighborhood change. The second involved documenting the celebration of the festival itself.

The Goombay Festival consists of three days of celebrations. It begins with a Junkanoo Rushout on a Friday night followed by two full days of weekend festivities. In addition to the Junkanoo Rushes, festivalgoers get to partake in a wide array of culinary delicacies and enjoy a diversity of musical performances. For many, the festival is also a time of reunion when former residents return to the neighborhood to reconnect with old friends and neighbors. As we pondered how to best



*Clockwise from bottom left: Jason Smith, Dr. Rebecca Friedman, Joe Burchell, Carl-Philippe Juste, Paola Katherine Rodriguez, Valarie Chaparro and Enrique Rosell take a photo during Goombay Festival weekend. Photo by Enrique Rosell ©2024.*

capture the multifaceted nature of this event, Enrique suggested engaging the talents of local photographers, much like a project that the Public Humanities Lab had done in collaboration with Carl-Philippe Juste and the *Commons for Justice* grant that captured the spirit of the neighborhood of Little Haiti.<sup>3</sup> Enrique reached out to his network of contacts and soon we were joined by volunteers eager to contribute their talents.

As the word got out about our project, dancer and Global Sociocultural Studies doctoral candidate A'Keitha Carey, offered to bring a team of Miami Dade College dance students and faculty who would focus on the Junkanoo performers and public dance performances during Goombay. AADS graduate students worked with Dr. Patterson at an information booth during Goombay Festival weekend. Lastly, we were joined by Jason Smith, a Digital Projects Coordinator at the Library of Congress, who advised us on the best practices of visual data collection and himself took over a hundred photographs of the festivities. As the photos below indicate, our team was able to successfully capture multiple facets of this weekend long event.



*Dr. Valerie Patterson with FIU graduate students Patraillia Davis Bryant and Sasha Wells at the 2024 Goombay Festival. Photo by Rebecca Friedman ©2024.*

<sup>3</sup> Little Haiti in Transition <https://commonsforjustice.fiu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/LHT-FinalCatalogue.pdf>

A few months after the festival, we geared up to document Little Bahamas of Coconut Grove. With the help of community leaders Mr. Reynold Martin and Ms. Carolyn Donaldson we got the word out about our planned neighborhood photo walk. Over forty people showed up on a Sunday afternoon to attend a photography workshop led by photographers C.W. Griffin and Alon Skuy before setting out to take pictures. Many participants were community members, whose knowledge of the Black and Bahamian heritage of Coconut Grove and Coral Gables lead to the submission of a broad array of images.

### Activating the archive

As we built our collection for the Library of Congress, we were aware that it would take some time before it would become accessible online. While attending the meetings of the Goombay Festival Planning Committee, Aarti noted that they had no website or other online presence which could pose challenges for those seeking information about the festival. As a result, when the LOC offered additional funds for community programming, the team decided to put the money into creating a website that could highlight the collection we were building and serve as a resource for the festival's organizers. Drawing from her doctoral research about Coconut Grove and working with colleagues at HistoryMiami Museum, the Wolfson Archives, the University of Miami Library's Special Collections and the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens Aarti also used the site to highlight extant oral history and archival collections related to the Black and Bahamian history of Coconut Grove and Coral Gables. FIU Communications student Jordan Ritchey who joined our team after the website went live, strategically used Instagram to get the word out about it. Since its launch, the website has been used by the Goombay Festival Planning Committee to reach patrons and vendors and



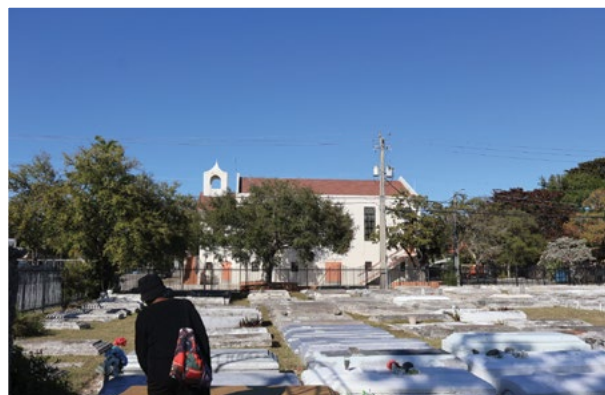
*From Top to Bottom:*

*A Junkanoo Rush takes place on Grand Avenue. Photo by Christine Cortes ©2024.*

*A vendor sells Bahamian themed souvenirs. Photo by Mariela Gonzalez ©2024.*

*The 2024 Goombay Festival King, Dr. Rick Holton. Photo by Paola Katherine Rodriguez ©2024.*





*From Top to Bottom:*

*One Grove mural on the corner of Douglas Road and Frow Avenue in Coconut Grove, Miami. Photo by Michele Romelus ©2025.*

*Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church photographed from Charlotte Jane Memorial Park Cemetery. Photo by Yaasmeen Johnson ©2025.*

*A man walks past the Queen Supermarket mural at 3601 Grand Avenue in Coconut Grove, Miami. Photo by Subrata Basu©2025.*

has been shared by the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, USA Today, along with various local news outlets.

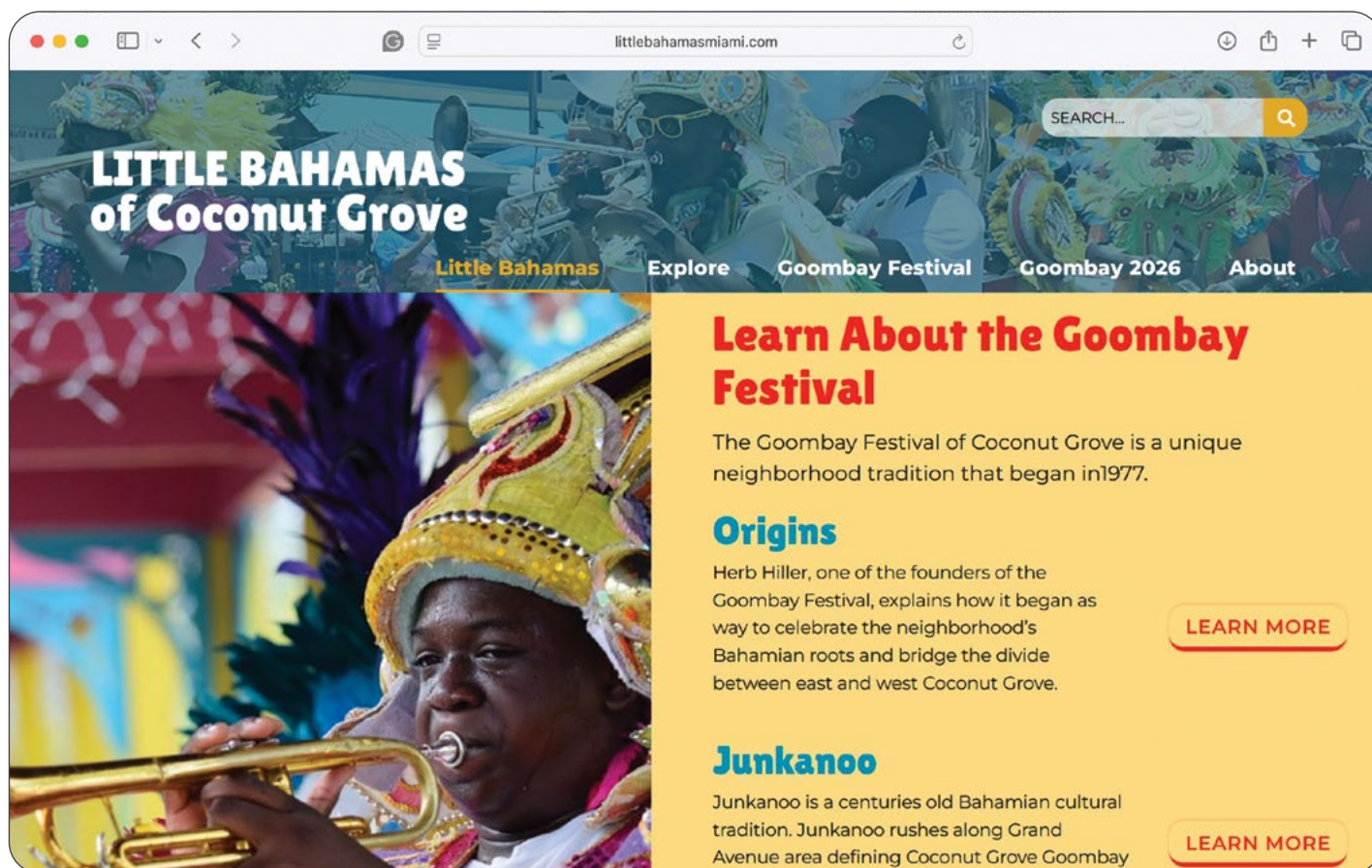
In addition to the website, we also planned public exhibitions, the first of which took place at the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in February 2025 as part of an event that celebrated the Black history of Coconut Grove. The images that were printed for the Vizcaya event have become communal assets. They were featured during a press conference about the Goombay Festival, were used as decorations for a food pantry fundraiser and at a Goombay Festival luncheon for community elders.

A second exhibition, co-curated by Aarti and Marianne Lamonaca of FIU Humanities Edge, took place at the St. Mary's campus of the Sanctuary of the Arts in the lead up to the 2025 Goombay Festival. It included photographs of the neighborhood that were taken during the photography walk along with those captured during the Goombay Festival the previous year. With the support of the Miami Dade College Gibson Center, we hosted a final pop-up showcase of images during the 2025 Goombay Festival itself.

## Reflections and next steps

Altogether the project team engaged nearly forty volunteers whose contributions led to the creation of a rich archive reflecting a diversity of perspectives. The inclusion of a multiplicity of voices and the contributions of community experts has made this project rich but also challenging. We have asked ourselves: who should determine how the festival and neighborhood are presented to the world? With only fifteen months to

<sup>4</sup> USA Today Ten Best Cultural Festivals <https://10best.usatoday.com/awards/miami-goombay-festival-coconut-grove-florida/>



Screenshot of littlebahamasmiami.com

collect data and three to finalize the collection, it was decided that our team would seek input when possible but otherwise trust the knowledge they gained from their many years of engagement in the neighborhood and with the community.

Our project was well conceptualized, in that we had thoroughly debated, thought through and budgeted for the different elements that would be a part of it (i.e., interviews, exhibitions etc.). However, just as we received unexpected gifts in the form of the volunteers who worked with us, we faced expenses that we had failed to account for such as the long-term hosting and maintenance costs for the website. While we have a long-term plan to ensure that these costs are covered, we were fortunate that the PHL had the discretionary funds

needed to cover these expenses in the short term. This was an important lesson that will no doubt shape how we approach future projects.

Our collection of printed images will be installed at Miami District 2 Commissioner, Damien Pardo's office on Grand Avenue in Coconut Grove, making them easily accessible to the local community. We are also exploring how the website we created, littlebahamasmiami.com, can be leveraged to aid in the efforts being made to spur economic activity into the Little Bahamas Business Corridor. Aarti joined Mikeya to serve on the board of the 2025 Goombay Festival. Like the rest of the committee, they are keen to see the festival flourish and grow despite planned developments that are likely to usher in a new wave of gentrification and neighborhood change.





Members of the project team take a photo with the Goombay Festival Planning Committee, Goombay King and Queen in front of the Miami Dade College Gibson Education Center. Photo by Jason Smith ©2024.



A pop-up exhibition in front of the Miami Dade College Gibson Education Center during the 2025 Goombay Festival ©2025.

Exhibition at the Sanctuary of the Arts St. Mary's campus. Photo by Aarti Mehta-Kroll ©2025.



Festivalgoers gather at the mainstage of the 2024 Goombay Festival as a performer takes to the stage. The building with the mural on the left was torn down a few months after this photo was taken to make way for a new development. It is one of many planned changes that will alter the physical landscape of the neighborhood. Photo by Jason Smith ©2024.



A Junkanoo Rush during the 2024 Miami Goombay Festival. Photo by Alvaro Angulo Sanchez.







## Acknowledgements

Photographers Mariela Gonzalez, Melanie Cruz, Yaasmeen Johnson, Paola Katherine Rodriguez, Alvaro Angulo, Joseph Burchell, Christine Cortes, and Jason Smith captured the celebration of Goombay from different vantage points.

Miami Dade College students Fernanda Romero, Lisbeth Moquete, Michelle Paredes, and Kimberlee Downer worked with FIU doctoral candidate A'Keitha Carey and Miami Dade College Professor Michelle Murray to document the dance practices of the Junkanoo performers and festival goers.

FIU graduate students Patraillia Davis Bryant, Bisola "Subomi" Babawale, Gerard Esposito-Peralta and Sasha Wells worked with Dr. Valerie Patterson at her pop-up history booth, featuring the work of Ms. Leona Cooper-Baker, during the Goombay Festival.

The photographers who participated in our neighborhood photo walk and contributed their images to the archive are Beverly R. Muzii, Christian Arias, Christine Malcolm, Claudia Masella, Ellen Bowen, Eric Osei Prempeh, Grimsley Matkov, Isabella Persad, Lea Nickless, Matthew Marr, Melanie Cruz, Melany Varela, Michele Romelus, Ruth Ewing, Subrata Basu, Tom Virgin, Tyler C. Greenan, Valerie Brunnette, Vicki Cerda, Wendy Cook, William Anderson, Yaasmeen Johnson.

This project would not have been possible without the support of the 2024 Goombay Festival Planning Committee which included Chairwoman Von Carol Kinchens-Williams and committee members Vicky Rivers, Carl Springer, Leon Leonard, Reynold Martin, Tonya Brown, Gener Romeo, Chala Cartwright, Kelsey Hayes, Patrice Godbolt and Mikeya Brown.

We also thank our colleagues Jeff Guin, Maria Trujillo and Christopher Rodriguez at the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens; Vanessa Navarro, Jeremy Salloum, Ashley Trujillo and Michele Reese at HistoryMiami Museum, Lou Kramer at the Wolfson Archives at MDC, Chelsea Jacks at the University of Miami Libraries, Rafi Maldonado, Luka Gotsiridze, Clayton Oliveira and Gaby Yero at Sanctuary of the Arts, Hernan Guerrero Applewhite of Geo Urban Consulting and Rebecca Peterson for their contributions to this project.



## FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Florida International University (FIU) is a top public university that drives real talent and innovation in Miami and globally. Very high research (R1) activity and high social mobility come together at FIU to uplift and accelerate student success in a global city by focusing in the areas of environment, health and innovation. Today, FIU has two campuses and multiple centers. FIU serves a diverse student body of more than 56,000 and 300,000 Panther alumni. FIU is ranked No. 4 Best Public University by the Wall Street Journal, and U.S. News & World Report places dozens of FIU programs among the best in the nation, including international business at No. 2. Washington Monthly magazine ranks FIU among the top 20 public universities contributing to the public good, and Degree Choices places it among the top 10 in the nation on return on investment.

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## PUBLIC HUMANITIES LAB

The Public Humanities Lab (PHL) serves as FIU's hub for public-facing research, teaching and community initiatives in the areas of arts and culture.

## AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DIASPORA STUDIES PROGRAM

African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS) at FIU is one of the leading programs in the United States engaged with the study of the peoples of continental Africa and of communities of the African diaspora throughout the world.





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