

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

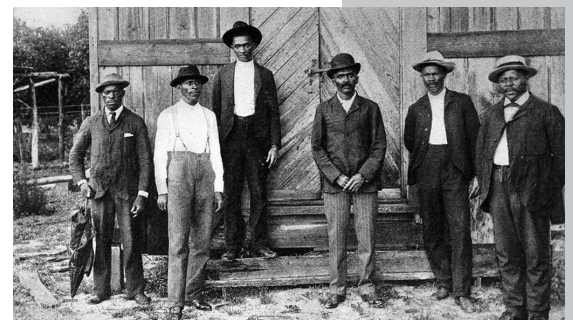
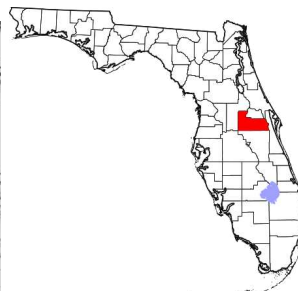
A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #5: Eatonville

As Black Americans, both those born free and those liberated after the passage of the [13th Amendment](#), attempted to settle into life after the [Civil War](#), they faced many obstacles. Acquiring land was one of the most significant challenges. This is what makes the story and legacy of [Eatonville](#), Florida so significant. During the Florida land rush of the 1870s, many wealthy northern whites bought homes in Florida around Lake Maitland. Black laborers were hired to clear the land, plant citrus groves, or work on local construction. In 1882, two white men, Josiah Eaton and Lewis Lawrence, offered to sell Joseph E. Clarke, a Black man, multiple acres of land west of Lake Maitland. This land, coupled with land deeded to the [African Methodist Episcopal Church](#), established the beginnings of what would become Eatonville. Eatonville elected local governance and officially incorporated as a town in August 1887, when 27 men, chosen as representatives, unanimously voted to do so. Eatonville became a haven for Black families in the South, as it gave them the ability to own and farm their land, as well as escape the realities of southern [Jim Crow](#) life. The elected leadership designated acres for the building of churches, government buildings, a school, and a cemetery. Some residents worked outside of Eatonville while others helped the growth of the town by opening stores. Two graduates of the [Tuskegee Institute](#) formed the [Robert Hungerford Industrial School](#) in 1899 and it would become one of the best schools for Black children in the South. The town would also become home to acclaimed author, [Zora Neale Hurston](#). Between 1865 and 1900, there were [approximately](#) 400 black towns, settlements, and enclaves. However, fewer than 150 became legally-recognized municipalities and even fewer would thrive like Eatonville. A community that gave Blacks an opportunity to self-govern and live truly free and independent, Eatonville, Florida is a remarkable example of determination and an inspiring story of historical racial progress and success as the nation's oldest all-Black community.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- How do local governments get their power to govern?
- Based on the power granted to them, what are some examples of services local governments are authorized to provide to the people?
- How do you think these services helped the Town of Eatonville thrive?



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