**Rhind Lecture Q&A – Unearthing the African Diaspora**

**Allan:** Can we discuss the role black African leaders played in the slavery process?

African traders procured and sold the African captives to European traders. For the most part, the victims of the slave trade and the African sellers belonged to different cultural groups who were at war with each other or developed conflicts with each other during the slave trade. These are well-documented facts. However, the fact that Africans sold other Africans into slavery has been used historically as a justification for the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. These arguments often suggest that slavery in Africa was like slavery in the Americas. In many parts of Africa, there were indigenous forms of slavery. While I do not know very much about these forms of slavery, some scholars contend African slavery was nothing like the inhumanity of chattel slavery in the Americas. My research interests focus on slave lives in the Americas, therefore, my knowledge of the African side of the slave trade for which there is a considerable literature is beyond my expertise.

**Nahid:** Is it true that a vast number of people enslaved from Africa were of the Muslim faith? That their belief in God kept them from going mad or committing suicide?

I would not say a vast number. What I said is that Michael Gomez noted (his essay on this is in book, *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: the Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee*, 2010) that a larger number of enslaved people of the Muslim faith came to the area now part of the Gullah-Geechee Corridor than other parts of the United States. There were also significant concentrations of enslaved peoples of the Muslim faith in Bahia, Brazil, and other areas. Historians have written about specific Muslim individuals who were enslaved in a variety of places in the Americas. I would say that enslaved Muslims were a minority among the people enslaved from Africa not a majority.

**Nahid:** Were mixed race ‘slaves’ freed more quickly than purely African ones?

Many Free people of colour were mixed race because European slaveholders sometimes freed the enslaved children they fathered with enslaved women. However, other enslaved people, including the “purely African ones” (I am not sure what you mean by this term as there are no “pure races”) also obtained their freedom legally through various means: self-purchase particularly if they could make money by hiring themselves out which the slave badges in Charleston regulated, or selling produce, crafts, or other goods in informal exchanges or institutionalized markets. Enslaved men who fought in wars or performed other military service were sometimes manumitted following their military service. In Cuba, and possibly other parts of Latin America, an institution existed known as the *coartación* that permitted gradual self-purchase by making payments in instalments.

**Steve:** Pierce Butler was an Irish American. He was a signer of the Constitution in 1787. His estates on Butler Island were managed by Roswell King from Conn. Was Roswell a Scottish American?

I have not seen anything that indicates Roswell King was a Scottish American. His father was Timothy King, a weaver and a naval commander during the American Revolution, and his mother was Sarah Finch. Roswell King could very well have been a Scottish American, and perhaps, he chose to relocate to Darien, Georgia, because of the Scottish presence there to pursue his business ventures.

**Nadine:** Hi Professor Singleton, I am really glad to have made it to this lecture. I am a Jamaican-Canadian who just came out of the British Library yesterday and was looking at the book 'Jamaica Surveyed' by Dr. Barry Higman. I was wondering if you could speak a bit more about the placement of the plot or provision grounds for the enslaved. It's pretty marked the distance usually between the provision grounds and the enslaved quarters. In this O’Ferrill plantation it seems both provision grounds and quarters were behind the wall. I'm wondering if that might have been the reason why their machetes/cutlass tools were close to them, than far away? Could you speak to that difference a bit more? Thanks so much!

I do not have direct evidence that the provision grounds were within the wall, but that is where I suspect they had small gardens and barnyard animals like chicken, pigs, or possibly goats. As for the machetes, you are correct they were and still are a general agricultural tool. Some of my insights regarding the machetes came from Barry Higman’s study of Montpelier Plantation, in St. James Parish, Jamaica. From account books for the plantation, Higman found that the plantation managers recorded the distribution bills, used for clearing land and harvesting sugar, but the managers did not record cutlasses. Bills were considered plantation property, but cutlasses slave property. He goes on the say that bills were only given to some workers, and if the person lost it, the enslaved person had to negotiate with the manager to get another one. So, managers regulated access to bills, but not cutlasses. Interestingly, Higman conducted excavations at the Montpelier slave quarters and he found 3 bills and 4 cutlasses. I am not sure how to interpret the presence of the bills, were these lost, forgotten, or left behind when the occupants abandoned the site.

At cafetal Biajacas, we found 13 machetes, at least 2 were like bills referred to in Cuba as *machetes mocha*, but the others were variations of cutlasses. I do believe that they were primarily used for agricultural work. At the same time, I am somewhat surprised that some control of access to machetes (cutlasses) was not implemented, because numerous violent acts by the enslaved occurred on nearby plantations that always involved machetes. I also speculated, as I did not have account books for the plantation, the enslaved laborers acquired the machetes on their own. According to Gloria García Rodríguez, in *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth Century Cuba: A Documentary History*, rural taverns sold knives, machetes, rifles to anyone, including the enslaved, with cash in hand and no questions asked.

**Nahid:** When they converted to Catholicism, where they also expected to give 10% of their savings as tithes to the Pope? And if they were expected to give tithes, will the Vatican support the demand for reparations now that groups around the Americas are making?

The relationship of the Catholic Church and slavery in the Americas is complex and differed through time and space. It also differs with the European colonizer and the religious order involved with slavery. For example, the Jesuits were major landowners and slaveholders in most of Latin America until they were expelled from Spain and its territories in 1767 because the Spanish monarch was concerned that they were becoming too powerful, and their allegiance was to the Pope not the Spanish Crown. The Jesuits were similarly expelled from France and Portugal for the same reason. In addition to the Jesuits, priests and nuns had numerous enslaved people labouring for them in many different contexts. The Catholic Church sanctioned the enslavement of Africans because it viewed Africans as lacking morals. The Catholic Church only began to condemn slavery long after other religious denominations spoke out against it.

I have not seen any references to Free Blacks contributing tithes to the Pope. Spain’s Religious Sanctuary Policy had nothing to do with the Pope. The royal decrees freed slave runaways who arrived at Spanish colonies from enemy territories (Denmark, England, France, Holland). Conversion to Catholicism was part of the process of transforming the runaways into loyal Spanish subjects, and they were expected to defend Spain and fulfil other roles as assigned.

I do not know the position of the Vatican on reparations, but according to what I have read, some Catholic institutions have already begun to provide reparations to descendants of the enslaved. The Jesuits in the US have vowed to raise 100 million dollars (USD) specifically for reparations. Some Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States are providing free tuition to descendants of enslaved persons that once belonged to Jesuit slaveholdings. Because the Jesuits kept good records on their slaveholdings, genealogists have been able to trace some of these families, and the descendants have enrolled in these schools.