

How to guide for traveling and tracing roots to Africa.

**ROOTS RECOVERED! The How To Guide for  
Tracing African-American and West Indian Roots  
Back to Africa and Going There FOR FREE OR ON  
A SHOESTRING BUDGET**

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**By**

**James E. White, Esq.  
Jean-Gontran Quenum, MBA**

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WHO WILL CRY  
FOR THE AFRICAN MAN  
PACKED LIKE SARDINES  
SAILING TO THE STOLEN LAND

WHO WILL MOURN  
FOR THE TWO THIRDS THAT DIED  
BEFORE REACHING THESE SHORES  
FROM THE AFRICAN SIDE

WHO CAN HEAR  
FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA  
SCREAMS OF AFRICAN PEOPLE  
WHO CHOSE DEATH TO BE FREE

WHO DOES SEE  
THE AFRICAN MAN  
PACKED IN PRISONS  
THE NEW SARDINE CAN

WHY DO YOU SLEEP  
AFRICANS IN THE WEST  
YOU FORGOT HOW YOU GOT HERE  
YOUR BRAINS ARE AT REST

WHEN WILL YOU RISE  
EMPOWERED BY TRUTH  
INFORMING THE MASSES  
ABOUT THIS POST-SLAVERY RUSE

WHEN WILL YOU CLING  
TO THE AFRICAN MASS  
RETURNING THEIR SPIRITS  
TO A FORGOTTEN PAST

HOW WILL YOU DIE  
STANDING STRONG OR BOWED WEAK  
AFRICANS OR NEGROES  
WHICH PATH DO YOU SEEK?

By James E. White -1995



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

An African-American and an African wrote this book. It was written out of our frustration with some people of African descent's peculiar questions about Africa and concomitant negative perceptions. This work is written in response to a great "problem" that exists among a segment of African-Americans and West-Indians. That problem is their negative perception of Africa, their ancestral home which subconsciously makes them think negatively about themselves. Whenever I announced that I was going to Africa, the comments were:

- **"Be careful."**
- **"Why do you want to go over there?"**
- **"What are you going to eat, the food is not safe."**
- **"I am afraid to go over there with all that killing"**
- **"Aren't you afraid?"**
- **"Do those people have houses?"**
- **"Those African people don't like us."**

I must comment on this last response because one of my colleagues said this to me. She is a highly intelligent and educated African-American attorney in her twenties. I was flabbergasted by her response because I would expect that type of response from someone over 50 years of age. In all my travels in Africa, when the African people realize that I am from America I constantly receive greetings like "Welcome Back," "You are back home now," "I am glad you guys are starting to come back here" and similar statements. I have experienced the best hospitality in Africa that I have experienced anywhere. However, my best greeting was from my friend's grandmother, in Dakar, Senegal.



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When we walked into her house she asked everyone present where they were from. When my turn came, I told her I was from America. She quickly corrected me and said "No you're not, you're from here, you are home now welcome back." I am sure some African-Americans and West Indians may have had some bad experiences with specific individuals from Africa, but these Africans are in the minority and are not representative of the majority of African people.

A number of people also fall victim to a number of untenable myths about Africa, which prevent them from traveling there.

These myths include but are not limited to the following:

- **Africa is full of dangerous wildlife everywhere**

Dangerous wildlife constitutes only a very small part of Africa and only a small portion of Africa contains significant wildlife. Africa is full of interesting people and cultures, not dangerous wildlife. You do not see lions and tigers walking up and down the street.

- **African people are very dangerous and violent**

In fact, the exact opposite is true. I feel safer walking in Africa at night than I feel in most American cities. In most African countries, violent crime is not prevalent and you do not hear of serial killers or children shooting up their schools in Africa. You almost never hear shouting or fights in the street. In fact, loud public screaming is generally considered uncouth.

Let me point out that Africa is not paradise, but neither is it the netherworld and there exists politically

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inspired violence in a few selected countries. However, these few countries do not represent Africa as a whole and in general Africa is a very peaceful place. As a whole, Africa is a lot less dangerous than the United States, because in most places the incidents of violent crime are very low.

- **Africa is nothing but famine and drought**

Whenever I go to Africa, I usually gain weight from all of the food I eat. Most countries have their own bottled water that can be readily purchased and most of the food is so fresh and natural that I come back to America healthier than when I left. You must be careful about what you eat because sometimes the food is very hot and the specter of diarrhea lingers if you drink the tap water. Still, always be careful of what and where you eat and avoid the same types of greasy spoons like you would avoid in the U.S.

- **African people are uncivilized and uneducated**

Africa, via Egypt, is the mother of all civilizations. The Egypt we see today is not the Egypt of the past. The founders of Egypt were Black Africans. Additionally, West African Empires were the seats of knowledge during the Middle Ages. African people today are very polite and urbane and most Africans speak at least three languages while we in America struggle with only English. Education is valued in Africa and most schoolchildren are very disciplined and want to learn.

- **It takes about 14 hours to fly to Africa.**

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I have heard this statement over and over again.  
Granted, if you are going to East Africa it takes a long time. But a non-stop plane to Dakar Senegal from New York's JFK Airport is a mere seven (7) hours -- six and one half (6 ½) hours if you get a strong tail wind. For a little more time than it takes to fly from New York to California, and less time than it takes to fly from New York to Hawaii, you can be in West Africa on a non-stop flight.

This book will attempt to eradicate the "problem" created by these myths.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **How this Book is Written**

This book is the world's first "Black Self Help Roots How to Travel Back to Africa Book." It is primarily a how to travel to Africa book but it is a fusion that is part history, part genealogy and part self-help. It is a compilation of our experiences and tedious research. This book is written with an informal tone, which includes personal accounts of our journeys. It is also written as a personal conversation between you and I. I will attempt to demystify your journey to Africa and be your guide the same way my co-author, Jean-Gontran Quenum was my personal guide. I cannot physically be there with you, thus this book is the next best thing. I want you to go to Africa and realize that it is not as unrealizable as most people think.

### **Why West Africa?**

The majority of African-Americans, African-Brazilians and West Indians were brought to the Western Hemisphere via the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade from Western Africa. During the early 1500's, the nations of Europe commenced a slave trade in which Africans from western Africa were brought to the European colonies in the Americas, which include the Caribbean Islands.

This slave trade continued for approximately the next 400 years as countless millions of enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic Ocean. This was the largest forced migration in the history of the world.

Thus, Western Africa was chosen because we are the descendants of the survivors of that horrific journey. It is our roots and we must recover them.

## **How to Use This Book**

To get the full benefit of this book you must read it in the order in which it was written. Read from the first page until you reach the sections that pertain to the specific countries. Then you may skip around to the particular countries you propose to visit. However, before you get to the country sections, do not skip around to sections that you may find interesting. You must read this book in the order in which it is written to get the full benefit.

The reason for reading this book in the order it was written is to take the reader through a mental process, which hopefully will:

1. Educate the reader about Africa;
2. Dispel any misconceptions the reader may have about Africa;
3. Encourage the reader to critically think about their perceptions of self in relation to Africa;
4. Increase the reader's self esteem;
5. Encourage the reader to research his/her roots; and
6. Demystify African travel in order to encourage the reader to travel there to experience Africa for himself or herself.

In order to accomplish these six goals the book should be read in sequential order up until the Country Section.

The first part of this book is psychological self-help. It deals with Africa and the perceptions one may or may not have about Africa, the origins of those perceptions and how those perceptions may or may not affect the Black self-concept. I want you to know

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about Africa and how civilized the people were and still are. I also want you to understand how your ancestors came to the Western Hemisphere and to think about what your ancestors were before they came here. If you know this you will truly believe Jesse Jackson's phrase "I am somebody."

Every action begins with a thought and the first part of this book is a thought process. The thought is like conception and the action is like birth. African-Americans and West Indians are battling centuries of negative stereotypes about Black people and Africa. These stereotypes have subliminally ill-effected our subconscious minds and self-concept. That is why the first part of this book concisely talks about our empires, our scholars and shows us that our history did not begin with slavery in the Americas.

The second part of this book is physical action. It is action, hopefully, borne from thought inspired from the first part of this book. The second part guides you on how to trace your roots back to Africa and to travel to Africa for free or on a shoestring budget.

If the first part of this book is successful in working on your mind then you should be stimulated to plan a trip to go back to the Motherland and have your own personal Roots adventure. This second part of the book attempts to clarify that adventure and guide you along the way and show that Africa is as easy, affordable and safe as any other vacation.

I want you to be stimulated to go to Africa, research your origins and have some fun. Therefore, read this book in the order that it is written in order to facilitate these mental and physical processes. Remember, where your thoughts go your body will follow. So first, let your thoughts go to Africa and eventually you will travel there. Consequently, please read this book in the order it is written!





# CHAPTER 1: THE BLACK SELF-CONCEPT

## Images & Icons

Images and symbols are very important to people in general and especially for people of the African Diaspora who are the victims of slavery and colonization. In this western dominated world, the bulk of positive powerful stereotypes are represented as "White," "Good guys wear white," "white magic" (which is supposedly "good") "Blondes have more fun, "Angel Food" cake (which is white) and "Devil's Food" cake (which is black) and on and on and on. Most positive stereotypes are conveyed as white while conversely, most of the negative stereotypes, especially in America, are represented as "Black." Pimps, a prostitute, welfare queens, dope addicts, rapists, thieves, savages, cannibals and headhunters and black magic conjure up the mental image of Black people.

These negative perceptions and myths are largely formed by the Western media and popular culture, which portrays Africa as savage and backward and Africans as either violent barbarians or simple, childlike people. The entertainment and news media have been the most incessant perpetrators of this negative perception and one of the root causes of the "problem." For example, let us examine the subconscious message sent by one of the most enduring movie heroes, Tarzan.

In the Tarzan story, a plane crashes over the "Dark Continent" and the only survivor is a White male infant. This infant is rescued by apes and is subsequently raised by them. As the infant grows into manhood, being raised solely by apes, he rules over the Africans with a supreme primal yell, which causes them to bow down in submission. The message conveyed by this story and others like it is that Africans are so backwards that mere

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apes could raise a White male -- and that White male would still be superior to the Africans.

Images found in religions send subliminal messages of inferiority to Black people. Christian icons of the White God image have had a debilitating subconscious effect on the minds of the people of the African Diaspora. The image of God as white nurtures the subconscious belief that the White person is born to be the supreme leader.

Naim Akbar in his book *The Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery* states:

*The person, who looks up and sees his physical characteristics shared by his deity, begins to develop the idea that he is exactly like God, or that God is like him. This is all right if one sees potential for growth in the idea. The confusion of the physical attributes with the very nature of God begins to make the person feel that his particular physical features have endowed him with automatic divinity. Such a person can believe in his own mind, that "I am God, I am Deity, I am Creator." He begins to believe that the blonde hair and the blue eyes that are on the portrait are the qualifications for divinity. This begins to cultivate an egomaniac. They begin to suffer from ego inflation.*

This ego inflation most likely affected the slave masters in North America and the colonial masters in Africa and caused them to relate to the African slaves as mere chattel and subhuman creatures and the Africans under colonial rule in Africa as barbarous and inferior.

The perpetuation of White God images and other symbols and standards that portray "whiteness" as preeminent have a virtually demeaning effect on the subconscious minds of people in

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the African Diaspora. A chain of subconscious reasoning occurs in the minds of some Blacks who view these images and symbols from infancy to adulthood. The reasoning is that because God and all that is represented as good and beautiful are White and White people share those godly characteristics, then the White characteristics and qualities are preferred and are the best.

The most famous example of the negative Black self-concept was demonstrated in the 1950s by the social psychologist Kenneth B. Clark, who was the best known and most regarded Black social scientist in the United States. Clark's work for the NAACP in the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case played a major role in that Supreme Court case.

Clark and his wife developed the famous "Doll Tests," which clearly demonstrated the negative Black self-concept that continues to affect us today. In the Doll Test, Black children in the early school ages were shown four identical dolls, two Black and two white, and were asked to identify them racially and to indicate which doll was best, which was nice, which was bad and which they preferred to play with. This test, administered to Black children across the country, showed that the majority of the children rejected the Black doll and expressed a sincere preference for the White doll. For the Clarks, these tests demonstrated the negative effects of racism on the personality and psychological development of Black children who would one day grow into adults. This negative self-concept is not confined to the United States but penetrates throughout the African Diaspora, even Africa itself.

### **Skin Bleaching in the Quest for Beauty**

I am revealing this information to you now because I do not want you to be shocked like I was, the first time I went to Africa. Skin bleaching is prevalent in Africa. Yes, I said skin bleaching. I

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was not on the Continent twenty-four hours before I saw it. I saw that Black is not necessarily viewed as beautiful in the Motherland.

The first time I went to Africa, I flew Air Afrique on my way to Benin and I had a 10-hour layover in the Ivory Coast, so the airline put us up in this very small nondescript local motel outside of Abidjan on the oceanfront. We arrived at this hotel at approximately 2:30 AM.

I woke up that next morning to the sound of the waves crashing against the shore. I was in Africa; I was back home; I was very happy. I woke up and met my Nigerian friends and one East Indian friend I met on the plane for breakfast. After we ate, we went for a stroll on the beach. There were boys on the beach engaged in what appeared to be soccer practice and there were small fishing boats going out and coming back with loads of fish in their nets -- and then I saw her. She was an average looking woman in her early twenties wearing very causal African attire with a matching headscarf. She was standing in the shade and had this white cream all over her face, arms, legs, hands and feet. I first thought it was suntan lotion but it was on too thick. I asked my friend from Nigeria what she had on and he said that she was trying to get "clair" which in French slang means to become light. I was shocked. "Not in Africa," I thought. However, there she was, standing in front of my face. She was attired in African garb but trying to "de-Africanize" herself. I heard about African-Americans in the 1930s and 1940s doing such things, but I could not believe that this was going on in the present time.

Bleaching is big problem in Africa, with mostly women doing it but the men do it also. Also skin bleaching is very dangerous and many African countries have been trying to ban it, launching public service campaigns about the harmful effects that come from bleaching your skin. For example, The Gambia has strict laws on the import and export of skin bleaching products. If

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someone is caught bringing such products into The Gambia, they are subject to fines up to \$2,000 and/or three years imprisonment.

A horrible example of the dangers of skin bleaching occurred in Ghana in the boxing ring. Ghanaian Boxer Percy Oblitei Commeu lost his belt and lost some of his skin in a national super-featherweight bout. The boxer's opponent opened a cut on his right cheek that his cut man could not close. Additionally, his nostrils and his right ear tore open, leaving him bleeding profusely. His skin was literally peeling off of his face. The reason why his skin fell off his face was skin bleaching.

Another horrible example of people trying to de-Africanize themselves is Michael Jackson. Do not take this as an insult towards Michael because, in actuality, I feel sorry for him because he is a true victim of a negative Black self-concept. Michael Jackson, however, has transgressed all bounds because in addition to his skin bleaching (no, I do not believe that he has a skin disease), he has surgically altered his face numerous times to de-emphasize his African features, namely his nose. I read several articles that said that he has had so many surgeries to thin out his nose that he now must insert plastic supports in his nostrils to keep them open.

If any of you have his "*Off the Wall*" album from the 1980's, compare his face back then with his face now. Michael Jackson has totally altered himself to the point that he is unrecognizable from the "original Michael Jackson." The very people who he was trying to look like are now ridiculing him in the press. I read the cover of one tabloid that now call him the "King of Pop" and the "King of Weird." Skin bleaching is not confined to African peoples. It is also a big problem with women on the Indian subcontinent who were also colonized people like the Africans. They also feel that lighter is better. Colonialism is the

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common thread between the Indian and African people which probably helped create their penchant for skin bleaching.

It is amazing how concepts of beauty change because Olaudah Equiano, an ex slave born around 1745, writes in his memoirs about the pre-colonial African perception of skin complexion.

This excerpt is as follows:

*... [f]or in regard to complexion, ideas of beauty are wholly relative. I remember while in Africa to have seen three Negro children, who were tawny, and another quite white, who were universally regarded as deformed by myself and the natives in general, as far as it related to their complexions.*

Colonization and the imposition of the "White is the best and most beautiful" complex into the subconscious minds of the colonized Africans in Africa is most likely the subliminal reason why they bleach their skin. Until all people of African descent understand how this inferiority complex was formed and take steps to eradicate it from their minds, we as a group of people will never again advance on a grand scale because we hate ourselves.

## **CHAPTER 2: WHERE DO AFRICAN-AMERICANS & WEST INDIANS COME FROM?**

Our knowledge about West Africa's very early history is limited by lack of written records from that period. However, the region has a rich oral tradition with specially trained people called Griots to preserve the history and traditions of the people. This oral tradition, combined with other sources such as early written records in Arabic, provide us with the history of West Africa and her empires.

### **Empire of Ghana**

The Empire of Ghana was the first West African kingdom of record. The records show that Ghana existed long before the 11<sup>th</sup> century. By 300 A.D., it was a country with an organized government. Some sources suggest that Ghana may have been a nation before the birth of Jesus.

The ruler of Ghana was a king who controlled the chiefs and the upper class people who helped run the country and collect the taxes. The King also controlled the trade and the gold used for it.

Ghana was very rich in gold with its wealth and power based upon it. At one period it had an army of 200,000 soldiers, of which 40,000 were bowmen. The King of Ghana was a master of a kingdom that stretched along the west coast of Africa between the Niger River and the Senegal River.

Ghana was located to the northwest of the present day Ghana and was situated on a wealthy trade route. Trade flourished in Ghana at the time when Western Europe was in the "Dark Ages" and



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it was on the crossroads in between the riches from the north and the riches from the south. From the countries of the north came sugar, fruit and wheat and from across the Sahara came Arab caravans carrying cloth, utensils and salt. In exchange for the aforementioned goods, Ghana gave gold, slaves, ivory and rubber. As Ghana was rich in gold, during colonization it became known as the Gold Coast, reminiscent of its former glory.

During the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, African Islamic warriors called the Almoravids invaded Ghana and as a result of those invasions she soon collapsed. The Empire of Mali in a short time replaced the Empire of Ghana.

### **Empire of Mali**

The Empire of Mali, like Ghana, was an empire built upon gold. The rulers of Mali were Mandinka (a.k.a. Mandingo) people and they were Moslem. Under their influence, Islam spread throughout West Africa. The people of Mali were very organized and created a strong central government. They were also famous for trade, scholarship, the fighting prowess of their soldiers, their use of metal to make tools and weapons, and their use of gold and copper money to purchase and sell goods and merchandise.

Mali reached its height under Emperor Mansa Musa. His empire included an area approximately twice the size of California. Mali's main cities were Timbuktu, Gao and Jenne -- which became the centers for trading of the Empire. The city of Timbuktu, also known as the "City of Gold," is of such great historical importance that in 1988 UNESCO designated it as a World Heritage Site. Timbuktu, as well as being a center of trade, was a major center for scholarship and culture and has been called the Oxford University of the Sahara. By the 1450s, the population of Timbuktu reached approximately 100,000 people, with a quarter of the population comprised of scholars.

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Emperor Mansa Musa was a devout Moslem and made his Hajj, which is the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. It is said that when he made his pilgrimage, he had a group of 60,000 people with him and approximately 12,000 were slaves. Eighty camels helped to carry the 24,000 pounds of gold which he used to help pay for the trip and to give charity to the people along the way. When the great African ruler stopped in Cairo for an extended period of time, he gave away so much gold that the Egyptian gold market crashed! On Mansa Musa's return trip from Hajj back to Mali, he brought back the famed architect Es-Saheli, who is credited for building the great mosques of Timbuktu and Gao as well as a palace for the king. After Mansa Musa's extravagant pilgrimage, the attention of Arabs and Europeans turned to West Africa.

Similar to Ghana, the Empire of Mali declined and was replaced by another group, the people of Songhai.

### **Empire of Songhai**

The Empire of Songhai became the largest empire of them all. At its pinnacle, it covered all of West Africa. It was approximately 3,000,000 square miles -- or about the size of the United States.

The greatest king of the Songhai was Askia Mohammed, the former general who became king. He was a lover of knowledge and surrounded himself with men of learning. He brought the Songhai Empire to its greatest height during his rule. Under Askia Mohammed, Timbuktu again became one of the foremost centers of learning. Leo Africanus, the great historian, commented on Timbuktu. He said: "a store of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men, that are bountifully maintained at the king's cost and charges and hither [to Timbuktu] are brought written books out of Barbary, which are sold for more money than any other

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merchandise." The University of Sankore, located in Timbuktu, became a major center for knowledge. It has been reported that some doctors in Timbuktu were so advanced in the art of surgery that they performed operations not done in Europe until 250 years later. Other universities at Jenne and Goa also became world-renowned.

In 1497, Askia Mohammed made his pilgrimage to Mecca in all the glory and splendor of his predecessor, Mansa Musa, who made his pilgrimage some 200 years earlier. In 1528, blind and over eighty years of age, Askia Mohammed was deposed by his son, Askia Musa. However, his son and the successors that followed did not have the political abilities of Askia Mohammed, and Songhai began its downward spiral.

Some 63 years after Askia Mohammed's death, in 1591, Songhai suffered the same fate as its predecessors, Ghana and Mali and was conquered by the Morrocans. By 1618, Songhai's economy had been ruined, Timbuktu was plundered and the books and centers of learning were all but destroyed. In recent years, Professor Henry Louis Gates of Harvard University recovered a large cache of books, which attests to Timbuktu's former greatness. However, visitors to Timbuktu today will find it hard to believe that a great center of learning once flourished there. Nevertheless, the Timbuktu of today still values learning and has almost 100% literacy because nearly everyone reads Arabic.

## **Other African Powers**

There were other notable West African Powers such as:

### **Kanem-Bornu Empire**

This empire lasted for approximately one thousand years from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A people living east of Lake Chad founded it. The empire's foundation was the Trans-

Saharan trade and it became an Islamic society in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The empire made numerous conquests and expanded its territory as far west as the Niger River and east to Wadai and north into the Fezzan. Kanem-Bornu declined in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Mossi Nations**

In what is now called Burkina Faso, ethnic groups moving from present Ghana founded the Mossi States in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Mossi believed in the divinity of their Kings and continue to exist to the present day. Despite their long contact with Islam, the Mossi retained their traditional religion, which has a strong emphasis on ancestor worship.

### **The Hausa States**

The six original Hausa Nations were located in the north of modern day Nigeria and the Hausa still primarily reside in northern Nigeria and southern Niger. The Legend of Daura has it that Abuyazidu, the 10<sup>th</sup> century ancestor of the Hausa rulers, married the Queen of Daura who bore him a son named Bawo. Prince Bawo in turn fathered six sons, each of whom ruled a Hausa State, hence the creation of the six Hausa nations. The Hausa are almost exclusively Muslim. They were vassals of Kanem-Bornu and were conquered by the Songhay in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and by the Fulani in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Hausa are still a major force in Nigerian politics.

### **The Yoruba Kingdom**

The Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo was one of the largest states in West Africa and it dominated both Benin regions of Nigeria and Dahomey (which is present day Benin). In the 1700s, the Yoruba's power and influence began to fade. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Yoruba Kingdom broke up into a number of smaller states as a result of the Fulani invasions, the slave raids from Dahomey, and the growing

contact with the Europeans. Alas, the Yoruba eventually succumbed to the British in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remained in that state until 1960. As a result of the slave trade, remnants of the Yoruba are evident in Cuba, Brazil and Puerto Rico.

### **The Ashanti**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ashanti people once occupied what is now southern Ghana. Under King Osei Tutu, they expanded their influence and the King made Kumasi his capital and it remains do this day. King Osei Tutu's Golden Stool, in which all subsequent kings were enthroned, symbolized the King's power. The Ashanti supplied slaves to the British and the Dutch in exchange for guns, which enabled them to maintain their power and expand their territory. The Ashanti are of Akan stock and are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. They were always known for their gold and are also famous for their art and fabrics, especially Kente cloth.

### **The Kingdom of Dahomey**

Dahomey was founded in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, with its capital at Abomey dominating much of what is now southern Benin. It was famous for its female Amazon Warriors, which was a regiment of women soldiers who were loyal to the King and were fearless warriors. Dahomey was also a major supplier of slaves to European Traders, especially the Portuguese. The last King of Dahomey named Behanzin tried to resist the French takeover of his kingdom but failed and was defeated in 1893. Dahomey then became a French colony until it's independence in 1960. Present day Benin is the former Kingdom of Dahomey.

### **The Tuaregs**

The Tuaregs are Berber speaking people who permanently inhabit large areas in Mali, Niger, Libya and Algeria. They also utilize an ancient Berber script called Tifinagh. They are mostly nomadic and live in the desert. Seen in various places in West Africa, the Tuaregs are a traditionally feudalistic society. At one time they were feared in the desert because they incessantly raided caravans in the Trans Saharan trade and they invariably sold a lot of slaves. The Tuaregs are Muslim, however the men wear their traditional blue veils but Tuareg women go unveiled.

### **The Fulani**

A nomadic people, the Fulani expanded from the Senegambia region and are spread all over West and West Central Africa even extending into the Sudan. Several African States including ancient Ghana, Senegal and some Nigerian States have had Fulani rulers. The Fulani are predominately Muslim.

I was compelled to give this abbreviated and condensed West African history lesson for the purpose of countering the negative perception of Africa and Africans as portrayed by the western media that has negatively impacted the minds of some African-Americans and West Indians. Africans had great kingdoms when Europe was in the Dark Ages. Nevertheless West African civilizations, like all of civilizations on the earth and everything that exists in the universe, have a life cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Nothing escapes the life cycle. Remember Rome? Remember Greece? Remember Egypt? Remember Ancient Persia? Remember the Ottoman Empire, Remember China? Remember the former Soviet Union? Look at them now and compare them to their former eminence. Everything except the Creator must go through the life cycle and eventually

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decline and die. So Africans throughout the Diaspora should be very proud of West Africa and Africa in general.

## **The Slave Trade**

### **The Beginning**

Slavery and the slave trade did not begin with the European arrival in West Africa. Slavery was well established in Africa as it was in the rest of the world. In fact, by the time the Europeans arrived, a two-way slave trade between West Africans and Arabs was already in existence as it had been for centuries.

Initially, the slaves obtained by the Europeans were taken by force during raids and kidnappings. However, African rulers, traders and the aristocracy, *the African elite*, who all grew wealthy from this slave business, sold most slaves taken out of Africa.

Olaudah Equiano, an ex-slave who procured his freedom, writes in his memoirs about the African rulers involvement in the slave trade. Equiano was born in approximately 1745 in the Kingdom of Benin. His excerpt is as follows:

*When a trader wants slaves, he applies to a chief for them, and tempts him with his wares. It is not extraordinary, if on this occasion he yields to the temptation with as little firmness, and accepts the price of his fellow creature's liberty with as little reluctance, as the enlightened merchant. Accordingly, he falls upon his neighbours, and a desperate battle ensues. If he prevails and takes prisoners, he gratifies his avarice by selling them.*

When the Portuguese first arrived in Africa in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they found a thriving economy with well established trading centers. In the beginning, slaves were only one of many other "goods" *exported* by the Portuguese from the West

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Africans and guns were only one of the many other "goods" *imported* by the West African elite. However, as time passed, slaves for guns became one of the driving forces for the slave trade because slaves became almost the exclusive African export and no other "goods" were exported. This in turn crippled the West African economy. In order to get more slaves, the Europeans fomented wars between different African ethnic groups so that the defeated people could be sent into the slave trade. As the African rulers sought to satisfy the European desire for more slaves they needed guns to fight these wars to obtain slaves and to protect themselves from also being captured and sold into slavery by their enemies who were also doing business with the Europeans. Thus, the European/African trade relationship, instead of stimulating growth in the West African economy, actually weakened it because it limited production of other goods. The main export became slaves and it sowed discord and disunity upon the various West African ethnic groups because of one ethnic group's fear of being taken and sold into slavery by a different ethnic group.

The West African elite, who had greedily involved themselves in this nefarious trade of human beings, was now trapped by their own greed. They now could not reduce or eliminate the slave trade or develop other aspects of their economy because the Europeans would cut them off and deal with another ruler who would supply them with slaves. However, if they were cut off, they could not get guns to protect themselves and ran the risk of being themselves captured and sold into slavery. These greedy African leaders received more than just guns but the guns were important to their self-preservation. These rulers were caught in a vicious cycle. The Europeans wanted more slaves and the Africans needed guns to procure slaves for the European and to protect themselves from other ethnic groups trying to enslave them. Thus a vicious cycle was created that was not easily ended.



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This slave-based economy was the product of European greed and the greed of the African rulers. It had a disastrous effect on West Africa because trade in other goods was greatly diminished and the slave trade drained Africa of its productive manpower. The slave traders wanted the healthiest, the most intelligent and the bravest Africans, so the best of the best of the Africans were taken, enslaved and sold. Once, when I was on Goree Island, in Senegal the curator commented extensively on this point, so much so that it became very emotional for many of the people listening.

Millions upon millions of productive and potentially productive people were taken out of Africa as slave and used as free labor by Europeans to build their economy. Thus, the African elite, by indulging in the slave trade, unwittingly helped finance the European Industrial Revolution, which in turn widened the technological gap between Europe and Africa, which enabled the Europeans to eventually conquer and colonize Africa.

If and when you go to Africa do not blame the African people for their ancestors selling your ancestors into slavery. On one of my trips to Senegal, a woman that I was traveling with did just that and very vocally expressed her feelings to the Senegalese tour guide. I understood her feelings, but it was the African elite who did the selling, not the everyday people of that time. Just like in modern times, we exercise very little control over what our elected officials and other African-American leaders do. The same thing happened during the slave trade. They were sold out just like the way some of our African-American leaders sell us out. The ordinary African man or woman had no say and was probably at risk of being killed or enslaved themselves if they tried to act against their slave trading rulers. However, some African countries have expressed extreme remorse over the slave trade.

In December 2000, the President of the Republic of Benin, the Honorable Mathew Kerekou formally apologized since, during

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the time of the slave trade, Benin sold a very large number of slaves to the Portuguese. The country even had a formal "Forgiveness Conference" in which Congressman Tony Hall and Senator James Inhofe traveled to Benin, with 100 Americans in attendance. Isn't it funny how this was not publicized much in the United States or in the African-American media outlets! I only knew about it because my co-author, who is from Benin, told me about it.

Furthermore, the Presidents of Togo, Ghana, the Vice-President of the Dominican Republic and other governmental, traditional religious and political leaders from Benin and other parts of Africa attended the conference which was called "*The Leader's Conference on Reconciliation and Development*." This conference created an opportunity for an apology to be heard from the descendants of some of the African perpetrators of the slave trade and forgiveness to be extended to them from the victims. This event should have been all the buzz over the African Diaspora, especially in the United States and the West Indies, with charter flights from all U.S. and Caribbean points heading to Benin. I must commend President Kerekou in coordinating this event and I encourage all of the readers to go to Benin because of this fact.

### **The First Leg of Slave's Journey**

After the European traders procured the enslaved Africans they were marched, oftentimes in chains, to the slave forts or factories along the West Coast of Africa. This march was long and harsh and millions died as they marched to the coast. Once the enslaved Africans reached the coast, they were subjected to a most humiliating and degrading inspection, treated like they were animals, by the European traders. More often than not, they were stripped naked and were picked and prodded by the trader and

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sometimes examined by a physician. After that process was over, they were packed into crowded slave dungeons until the slave ship was ready to leave or to wait for its arrival. The enslaved Africans had to be constantly monitored in these dungeons because they tried to escape, either by physically escaping or escape by suicide.

I have been in these slave dungeons and it is like being thrown in a concrete basement with no light, and no soft place to find. Nothing but hardness and darkness exists. You can barely see your hand in front of your face when the door is closed. While in that place, I imagined what it was like to be taken from your community and family, chained up and marched as you watched people die along the way. I imagined of what it must feel like to be fatigued, hungry, maybe weak and afraid, sensing total hopelessness and uncertainty about what will happen next. As I sat on the floor, I looked down and felt and saw scratch marks in that hard rock floor. The tour guide told me that someone's fingertips made those marks as they clawed the floor in agony. I then was overcome with such a feeling that I could not move, I could only cry silently. My eyes tear as I write this because I relive that moment as I am writing this. The same thing happened to me in Benin as I marched down the Route of the Slaves from the tree where they sold the slaves to the ocean through the Gate of No Return. There is a big arch near the edge of the ocean, with depictions of enslaved Africans carved into the arch. As I stood under the arch, I looked forward at the ocean and back towards the land. I did this several times, looking at the beautiful landscape behind me and the vast expanse of ocean in front of me. My knees buckled and I dropped in the sand and cried aloud very vocally. My companions who were Africans from Benin looked astonishingly at me and did not know what to say. Then one of them said in broken English "I am sorry. I am sorry if any of my people had anything to do with this." My co-author just patted me

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on my back for comfort. I was happy, angry and sad at the same time, like I died and was reborn at the same moment. I felt like I was back home, yet displaced because I did not know where I belonged. Do not ask me to explain it because I cannot. I was happy to be back in Africa and sad because I did not know if this place is where I came from. I was angry because I did not know who and where my family was in Africa.

### **The Journey Across the Sea**

When the slave ship was ready to sail, the enslaved Africans were chained together and were packed into small boats and taken to the slave ship. Once on board, most were taken below deck and literally packed like sardines side by side in order to get the maximum number of slaves on board. There was no consideration for the African's comfort and only consideration for the profit margin. The ship's captains had to pack the ship tightly in order to compensate for any Africans that might be "lost" along the journey. The great loss to the profit margin came from disease, with the captains fearing that disease would reduce his profits. Furthermore, the captains worried that they and their crew might catch the various diseases that the enslaved Africans had.

The conditions on the slave ship were worse than in the slave dungeons. The enslaved Africans were kept below deck with no fresh air or sunshine. No toilets, no means of washing, no privacy – they were just thrown in the bottom of the ship like one over stuffs a suitcase and forces it to close. Once in awhile they had water thrown on them as a bath. The stench of the slaves was so great that occasionally they were brought on the top deck to air out. As in the slave dungeons, the enslaved Africans tried to escape by starving themselves or jumping overboard. It has been said that an innumerable amount of enslaved Africans died during that journey because they were thrown into the ocean or jumped overboard. If their bones were brought to the surface of the ocean,

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one could make a "bridge" from those bones and walk across the ocean from Africa to the Americas.

Untold millions of Africans died during the journey from Africa. The exact figure will never be known because after the "abolition of the slave trade" it continued illegally for quite awhile. When this horrific journey across the ocean was completed the first stop was the "West Indies." The survivors of that journey were in for another inspection and subsequent sale to new owners.

### **The Caribbean Seasoning**

The overwhelming majority of the enslaved Africans did not arrive in the Americas until they had been seasoned in the Caribbean Islands. They were not brought directly to the American colonies because the colonists thought the enslaved Africans would be a danger to them if they were not already tested and "broken."

The rationale behind the breaking of an enslaved African was compared to the breaking of a wild horse was described by the slave breaker as follows:

*What we do with horses is that we break them from one form of life to another, that is, we reduce them from their natural state in nature; whereas nature provides them with the natural capacities to take care of their needs and the needs of their offspring, we break that natural sting of independence from them and thereby create a dependency state so that we may be able to get from them useful production for our business and pleasure.<sup>1</sup>*

One of the techniques used by the slave breaker for "taming" the enslaved African was as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Lets Make A Slave, 1970

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*Take the meanest and most relentless nigger, strip him of his clothes in front of the remaining male niggers, the female, and the nigger infant, tar and feather him, tie each leg to a different horse faced in opposite directions, set him afire and beat both horses to pull him apart in front of the remaining nigger. The next step is to take a bull whip and beat the remaining nigger to the point of death in front of the female and the infant. Don't kill him but put the fear of God in him, for he can be useful for future breeding.<sup>2</sup>*

There were various methods used for controlling slaves. One of the most familiar one to modern day African-Americans was the "William Lynch" speech that was broadcast at the Million-Man March in 1995. At the Million-Man March millions listened as that speech was read and were astonished because it appears that the effects of that slave control method are still with us today. In this speech, William Lynch instructed the slave master on how to use various methods of exploiting the differences between the slave such as skin complexion, hair texture, "house niggers vs. field niggers," etc. This was used to keep the enslaved Africans divided in the West Indies and the colonies so that the slave masters would be in control and not have successful revolts against their masters. The William Lynch speech is as follows:

*Gentlemen,*

*I greet you here on the bank of the James River in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and twelve. First, I shall thank you, the gentlemen of the Colony of Virginia, for bringing me here. I am here to help you solve some of your problems with slaves. Your invitation reached me on my modest plantation in the West Indies where I have experimented with some of the newest*

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<sup>2</sup> Lets Make A Slave, 1970

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*and still oldest methods for control of slaves. Ancient Rome would envy us if my program is implemented. As our boat sailed south on the James River, named for our illustrious King, whose version of the Bible we cherish, I saw enough to know that your problem is not unique. While Rome used cords of wood as crosses for standing human bodies along its highways in great numbers you are here using the tree and rope on occasion.*

*I caught the whiff of a dead slave hanging from a tree a couple of miles back. You are not only losing valuable stock by hangings, you are having uprisings, slaves running away, your crops are sometimes left in the fields to long for maximum profit, you suffer occasional fires, your animals are killed. Gentleman, you know what your problems are. I do not need to elaborate. I am not here to enumerate your problems, I am here to introduce to you a method of solving them.*

*In my bag here I have a foolproof method for controlling your Black slaves. I guarantee every one of you that if installed correctly it will control the slaves for at least 300 years. My method is simple. Any member of your family or your overseer can use it.*

*I have outlined a number of differences among the slaves and I take these differences and make them bigger. I use fear, distrust, and envy for control purposes. These methods have worked on my modest plantation in the West Indies and it will work through out the South. Take this simple little list of differences, and think about them. On the top of my list is "Age". But it is there only because it starts with an "A"; the second is color or shade, there is intelligence, size, sex, size of plantation, status on plantation, attitude of owners, whether the slave lived in*

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*the valley, on a hill, East, West, North, South, have fine hair, coarse hair, or is tall or short. Now that you have a list of differences, I shall give you an outline of action but before that I shall assure you that distrust is stronger than trust and envy is stronger than adulation, respect or admiration.*

*The Black slave after receiving this indoctrination shall carry on and will become self re-fueling and self-generating for hundreds of years maybe thousands.*

*Don't forget you must pitch the old Black male vs. the young Black male, and the young Black male against the old Black male. You must use the dark skin slaves vs. the light skin slaves and the light skin slaves vs. the dark skin slaves. You must use the female vs. the male, and the male vs. the female. You must also have your white servants and overseers distrust all Blacks, but it is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect and trust only us.*

*Gentleman. These kits are your keys to control. Use them. Have your wives and children use them, never miss an opportunity. If used intensely for one year, the slaves themselves will remain perpetually distrustful.*

*Thank you gentlemen.<sup>3</sup>*

These previously mentioned techniques of division outlined by William Lynch might have worked because we still use terms such as "good hair," "red bone," light skinned vs. dark skinned and the relentless female vs. the male dynamic, which exists today. Slavery is one of the root causes of the negative Black self-concept and is still affecting us today. If we dig for our roots and find out

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<sup>3</sup> Lets Make A Slave, 1970



where we come from and go and see it for ourselves, this negative continuum of self-hatred and senseless division may end.

### **Differences in Slavery?**

Among the Africans, the slaves usually became workers for the African elite and some were used for the exchange of goods. The Arabs, like the Africans, mostly utilized the slaves in the households of wealthy families. Often the slaves converted to Islam and as a result they became "brothers" in Islam with their Arab masters. The cruelty and brutality associated with slavery in North America rarely existed among the Africans and Arabs. In fact, in some African languages there is no distinction between the words prisoner and slave. Slaves were often prisoners of war or criminals who had committed crimes like adultery. By consistent good conduct they could free themselves, become leaders and sometimes marry their master's daughters.

Nonetheless, this does not diminish or excuse slavery and the African and Arab role in the slave trade. Slavery under any circumstances is wrong. However, this fact must be mentioned to contrast and compare the slavery in other places with the chattel slavery of the Americas. This chattel slavery in North America was more barbaric and inhuman and the Africans were thought of as subhuman, similar to cattle that could be bred, sold or killed at the whim of his master. It was total subjugation in which you could never rise up and be free. Even in the Latin American colonies, especially Brazil, manumission (the slave working to free himself) was not prohibited and a slave could become a free man never to be enslaved again.

A very interesting story of African slave self-emancipation and progress occurred on the Indian subcontinent in a region called the Deccan. When Islamic rule was at its height in India there were a great number of Ethiopians, also known as Abyssinians

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Habshis or Siddis, who were coming into India as traders, mercenaries and slaves, with the slaves being the majority. However, over time, a number of the Ethiopians became great leaders such as prime ministers, military commanders and sultans.

The most notable of these Ethiopians was Malik Anbar, who began as a slave and rose to the top and became a commander-in-chief in the Mogul Empire of India. Subsequent to becoming commander-in-chief, he seized the throne and became the ruler of the Deccan, which lies east of Bombay.

Motamid Khan, an Indian historian has this to say about Malik Anbar:

*This Anbar was a slave, but an able man. In warfare, in command, in sound judgment, in administration, he had no rival or equal. He well understood predatory warfare, which in the language of the Deccan, is called bargi-giri. He kept down turbulent tribes and maintained his exalted position to the end of his life and closed his career in honor. History records no other instance of an Abyssinian slave at such eminence.*

Thus enslavement of the Africans in North America may have been the worst in the history of mankind because once you were a slave you were always a slave. Working your way to freedom was never an option. Becoming a great leader like Malik Anbar was impossible.

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## **In Search of Roots**

It has been almost 30 years since the miniseries "Roots" graced the TV screens across the United States and roused an interest in genealogy for people of African descent in North America and the Caribbean.

However, the search for the roots of African-Americans and West Indians is not as easy as the search for the roots of people of European descent. This is because the vast majority of African-Americans and West Indians are the descendants of the African slaves brought to the "New World," so tracing their roots is very difficult. It is difficult because slaves had no legal rights, thus they are not found in many of the traditional record sources for that period. Do not let this impediment stop your quest for your roots. It is not insurmountable. If Alex Haley did it, so can you.

Nevertheless, the record sources for West Indians may be easier to find because of the geographical limits of the islands and availability of the slave owner's records and other public records concerning slaves. Furthermore, a lot of islands managed to retain some African traditions that can be traced back to Africa.

## **Finding African-Americans Roots**

Tony Burroughs, the author of "Black Roots: A Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African-American Family Tree" has outlined certain steps to take when tracing your African-American roots. This is an excellent book and a must buy for persons searching for their African-American roots. I suggest that you buy it if you are serious about genealogy. Also read "How to Trace Your African-American Roots" by Barbara Thompson Howell. This is also an equally excellent book worth purchasing.

These steps are as follows:

### **Family Sources**

Gather all of the information you know about yourself and other family members. Find your oldest relatives and interview them. Ask them the names of the oldest relatives that they know of and where they died and where they are buried. Also try to elicit family stories from them, which may contain traditions that can relate back to Africa or a specific historical event. Remember there are still people alive today who knew former slaves or who knew someone who knew a former slave. Ask them open questions so that you learn more than just names and dates and deaths and births.

Question all of your relatives and search for sources such as old bibles, birth records, obituaries photographs, postcards, yearbooks, letters, diaries, insurance records, military records, marriage documents and family heirlooms and traditions that may have significance.

### **Trace Your Family Tree Back to 1870**

1870 is a very important year for African-American genealogy research because the majority of African-Americans living in the United States prior to the Civil War were enslaved and the 1870 census is the first one to list all African-Americans by name. Take your ancestors back to that date. To do that you should research your ancestors in the standard genealogical records.

### **Identify the Last Slave Owner**

Before you take for granted that your ancestors were slaves prior to the Civil War, remember that 1 in every 10 African-Americans were free when the Civil War commenced in 1861. If you are not sure then go to the U.S. Free Population Schedules of the 1860 census.

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If you are certain that your ancestors were slaves at that time, you should identify their last slave owner. Generally, the slaves took on the name of their former owners when the Emancipation Proclamation freed them but many did not and chose to name themselves. You must delve deeply in the records to prove the name of the last slave owner before you can continue your research. Records include but are not limited to, county histories, records of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Bureau, the Freedman's Bureau, slave narratives, the Southern Claims Commission and Military Records, especially those specific to "Colored Troops."

### **Research the Slave Owner & Slavery**

Since slaves were property, once you find the slave owner, search the records to find out what he did with his property. Research wills, probate records, plantation records, bills of sale, land deeds and runaway slave information in old newspapers.

Also study what it was like to be a slave and a slave owner. Also study the various slave laws such as the Black Codes etc. Immerse yourself into the life of the slave and the slave master. This will give you a better perspective of where to search because it tends to make you think like the person or persons you are researching. Think like the slave owner and think like the slave.

### **Back to the Motherland**

The majority of African Americans came from a definable section of West Africa. Records of slave sales and auctions, slave advertisements, ship manifests and logs may give you clues where your slave ancestor was from in Africa. Learn everything about how, when and why the slaves were transported to the state in which you found your last slave owner. Also learn the history of the Underground Railroad as it pertains to your family, if possible.

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Trace the Underground Railroad backward to where your slave ancestor embarked.

#### **From the Caribbean**

At the end of World War II, a large number of West Indians emigrated from the Caribbean to the United States. If you discover that your ancestors are from the Caribbean, you must trace them back to their Caribbean Island and then if possible back to Africa.

Also, once you identify your Caribbean roots, go to your island and critically examine the traditions and festivals of that particular island and compare them with specific ethnic groups and geographical regions in West Africa. Look at Junkanoo, the stilt dance, certain drum rhythms and folklore and dances and you will see that various African traditions were retained in the Caribbean.

#### **Oral History**

Foreign sounding words used by parents and grandparents may be a link to your African heritage. Look at Alex Haley who recalled his family's stories and remembered the word "Kinte" and used that as a clue in recovering his roots. Foreign sounding words used by your family to describe everyday activities like eating, going to the bathroom or sometimes epithets used in anger may be a link, especially when your family only uses these words. My family has slave stories in which I was able to easily identify the name of the last slaveholder on my maternal grandmother's side. Remember there are a lot of people who knew former slaves. Talk to your oldest relatives about oral history, you may be surprised.

#### **Finding West Indian Roots**

Slaves from West Africa made up the majority of the population in most Caribbean countries. Remember, some islands received shipments of slaves that predominantly came from certain

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regions of Africa. For example, a large number of enslaved Africans from Benin were brought to Haiti so a lot of Haitians have their roots in Benin -- as evidenced by the voodoo, which to this day predominates in the Republic of Benin. Also, certain words in Creole have Benin origins.

The slaves were the personal property of the slave owner, thus they could be bought, sold, given as gifts, bequeathed and inherited. Slaves were mere possessions of the owner similar to livestock. Most records relating to the slaves are found among the records relating to the slave owners.

However, in the Caribbean, unlike the United States, you cannot assume that your African ancestors were slaves because many Africans freely migrated to the West Indies from the 1830s. Yes, FREELY MIGRATED! Many African slaves were freed from illegal slave ships and settled in the West Indies and that maybe one of the reasons why the West Indies has retained a lot of African traditions.

Also many Black soldiers were discharged in the West Indies. Some were previously bought as slaves for the British army; some were liberated Africans and some were African-American refugees from the War of 1812.

The slave trade, also known as the "triangular slave trade," was so named because merchants traded goods for slaves from the trading outposts on the West African Coast. The slaves were then traded or sold for goods or merchandise in America and the West Indies. In turn, these goods were sold in Europe.

Prior to 1698 the Company of Royal Adventures of England Trading with Africa monopolized the British slave trade. Then various companies oversaw British holdings on the West Coast of Africa until 1833 when the British government bought the companies with its various forts and settlements. These records are

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at the National Archives in the United Kingdom and include details of payments for slaves, company employees and general correspondence.

Until 1808 there are sparse records of slaves transported from Africa to the West Indies and any that occur after that date relate to the slave ships that were captured for illegally transporting slaves, known as Liberated Africans.

Until the conception of the slave registries in approximately 1814, most records relating to the slaves are to be found among the personal records of the slave owners.

Like African-Americans, it is essential for West Indians to find the slave owner and his records. Without this information it will be very difficult to trace your roots before the 1830s unless they had been freed by manumission or baptized or buried by clergy. If this occurred, then the name of the owner would be identified. Also, do not assume your slave ancestor took the name of the slave owner because this was not always the case.

The most useful West Indian sources relating to slaves are:

1. Deeds and registers of property.
2. Probate Records.
3. Manumission Records.
4. Church Records.
5. Newspapers for auction and sale notices and details of runaways and revolts.
6. Plantation Records.
7. Records of the protectors and patrons of slaves, i.e. similar to American abolitionists.
8. Oral history



9. Foreign sounding words used by parents and grandparents.

### **Free Internet Resources**

There are numerous FREE web sites that deal with the subject of African-American and West Indian genealogy. They include but are not limited to:

1. **Christine's African-American Genealogy Website.** Keywords or regions define the links. There are links to African American cemeteries and U.S. Census data, as well as to other African genealogy Web sites. Christine's page also has a section to help beginners get started tracing their past.
2. **The International Black Index Source (IBIS) Directory.** It specifically is for people of the African Diaspora.
3. **The CaribbeanGenWeb Project.** It specifically is for Caribbean people.
4. **Afrigeneas.** Slave data contained in public and private records, keys to the last slave owner and links to topical newsgroups.
5. **RootsWeb.** Claims to be the Internet's oldest and largest free genealogy website.
6. **Salon's Story on Web Genealogy.** Copious amounts of good information.
7. **Cyndi's List off Genealogy sites on the Internet.** Special sections devoted to African roots.
8. **Genealogy.com** has special sections devoted to African-Americans and West Indians.

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9. **Moving Here** - a database of digitized photographs, maps and objects, very useful for West Indians.
10. **The Society of Genealogists** library has a good section on the West Indies.

### **Modern Technology**

Genealogy is fast becoming popular among African-Americans and West Indians and DNA testing can now be used to trace your roots. With DNA testing it is now possible to quickly trace your roots back to ethnic groups in Africa. If all else fails, use this method to find out which ethnic group you come from and their geographical area.

Companies offering genetic tests to trace ancestry are springing up all over the place and one new company, African Ancestry Inc., an African American owned company located in Washington D.C., specializes in tracing lineages back to Africa. The company offers two DNA based genealogy tests at about \$349 a piece. The tests are called the MatriClan Test and the PatriClan Test.

The MatriClan Test looks at mitochondrial DNA. Unlike regular DNA, which is a combination of the mother and father, mitochondrial DNA is passed unchanged from mother to child. The PatriClan Test studies the man's Y chromosome. Although this test can only be performed on men, it can reveal significant information since, like mitochondrial DNA, it is not a combination of the mother and the father and passes unchanged.

African Ancestry will collect your DNA from a cheek swab, then sequence a portion of the genetic material and then match that sequence against a database that contains genetic information from West Africa.

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African Ancestry has a database, which includes DNA sequence information from natives of West Africa, which is where untold millions of Africans were procured for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Although all humans are nearly identical on the genetic level, African Ancestry, in their database focus on the mutations that have occurred over time that caused variations between African populations that often lived in geographic isolation from one another.

The African Ancestry database contains DNA sequence information from approximately 10,000 people from about 90 West African ethnic groups. They also utilized DNA sequence information from other populations in Africa. They claim they can link about 85% of African Americans with their African ancestors ethnic group. Personally, my hat is off to African Ancestry because they are people of African descent who specialize in helping other people of African descent find out where they come from. They have taken a high tech route to roots recovery.

African Ancestry's contact information is as follows:

African Ancestry

5505 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Suite 297

Washington, DC 20015

Tel: 202-439-0642

Fax: 202-318-3088

Website: [www.africanancestry.com](http://www.africanancestry.com)

e-mail: [Info@africanancestry.com](mailto:Info@africanancestry.com)

A nonprofit organization called African American Roots project, operated by Boston University geneticist Bruce Jackson,

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offers DNA tracing to African-Americans and West Indians **FOR FREE!** Mr. Jackson says he has gone to West Africa to collect the DNA of approximately 2000 Africans. His test is similar in principle to the aforementioned.

DNA testing is a quick and easy way to trace your DNA roots back to Africa, but it has the disadvantage of not allowing you to trace your family tree back to West Africa and find specific family members, similar to what Alex Haley did when he went back to Gambia. I have been to Gambia, been to Kunta Kinte's village and met one of Kunta Kinte's descendants, Binta Kinte. DNA testing is quick but you can miss the potential for an Alex Haley style family reunion.

I recommend that you utilize the painstaking genealogical research combined with the DNA testing to find your roots. In utilizing both of them you may get more than you bargained for as the following story demonstrates.

### **A True Story of a Roots Recovery**

Pearl Duncan, an African-American of Jamaican heritage, used a combination of DNA testing and genealogical research to trace her roots to Ghana and she met one of her ancestral cousins without ever setting foot in Africa! When Ms. Duncan was a young girl, she observed various words her Jamaican born parents used. If she was making a mess, she was told not to "chaka-chaka" in the room. If she ate her meal too fast, she was told not to "nyam" her food. Her father's nickname was "Pari" and her mother's nickname was "Dockyi." Also, Ms. Duncan discovered that her family descended from the Maroons, who were escaped slaves who maintained their autonomy during British colonization. Ms. Duncan, who is a travel writer and former college professor, traveled to Jamaica and went to where he ancestors lived and heard some of the same words she remembered hearing as a child .

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Ms. Duncan's desire to find her roots led her to a linguistic anthropologist at The Smithsonian Institute who informed her that those words she heard as a child came from the Akuapim ethnic group, which is part of the larger Akan ethnic group in present day Ghana. The anthropologist also told her that her father's nickname "Pari" was a shortened form of the surname Opare and that he knew some Opare. Now DNA testing came into play.

Ms. Duncan located the Opare on the East Coast and contacted the researchers at the University of Arizona's Human Genome Diversity Project and asked them to run a test on her father's DNA, since his name was "Pari," the shortened form of Opare. Since she had located some of the Opare in the U.S. she had access to their DNA samples. When the lab results came back, 30 samples of Y-chromosome DNA from male Opare matched her father's DNA. Ms. Duncan made a roots recovery without leaving the United States.

Ms. Duncan then found Vida Opare, a nurse who immigrated from Ghana, and whose family DNA matches her father's DNA. Ironically, she looks more like Ms. Duncan than two of Ms. Duncan's sisters.

Ms. Duncan, who is also an author, is writing a book about her genealogical adventure entitled "DNA Dawns Bringing Daylight." I do not know if it is out yet, but I recommend that you look for it for inspiration.

### **Other Contacts and Sources for Genealogical Research**

- Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS)  
P.O. Box 73086  
Washington, DC 20056  
Publications: *Journal*, *AAHGS News*

*Roots Recovered!*

Website: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~mdaahgs/>

The AAHGS has a chapter in most states. Contact the Washington office to find a chapter nearest you.

- African American Genealogy Group

P.O. Box 1798

Philadelphia, PA 19105-1798

215-572-6063

Website: <http://www.libertynet.org/aagg/>

- The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

515 Malcolm X Blvd.

New York, NY 10037-1801

212-491-2200

- National Genealogical Society (NGS)

4527 Seventeenth Street N

Arlington, VA 22207-2399

703-525-0052

Publications: *Journal, National Genealogical Society Quarterly (NGS)*

Website: <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org>

- Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940

Austin TX 78720-0940

Website: <http://www.fgs.org/~fgs/>

*James E. White*

Publication: *Newsletter, The Forum*

- Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History  
1407 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-667-2822  
Website: <http://www.artnoir.com/asalh/>  
Publication: *Journal, Journal of Negro History*
- African American Heritage Preservation Foundation, Inc.  
C/O E. Renee Ingram  
420 Seventh Street NW, Suite 501  
Washington, DC 20004-2211
- African-Atlantic Genealogical Society (AAGS)  
P.O. Box 7385  
Freeport, NY 11520

**Table One**

**List of Ethnic Groups and Countries**

**Ethnic Group****Country**

Adja	Benin (Dahomey)
Adja-Waryi	Togo
Agni-Baule	Ivory Coast
Ashanti	Ghana, Ivory Coast
Ahanta	Ghana
Aizo	Benin (Dahomey)
Baga	Guinea
Balante	Guinea Bissau
Bambara(Mandingo)	Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia Mali, Senegal Sierra Leone



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Bariba	Benin (Dahomey)
Bete (Kru)	Guinea, Ivory Coast
Beriberi	Niger
Bobo	Mali, Burkina Faso
Dan	Ivory Coast
Dendi	Benin (Dahomey)
Diola	Senegal, Burkina Faso
Djerma-Songhaj	Niger
Dogon	Mali
Efiks	Nigeria
Evalue	Ghana
Ewe	Ghana, Togo
Fang	Cameroon, Gabon

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Fanti	Ghana, Liberia
Fon	Benin (Dahomey)
Fula <sup>4</sup>	Gambia, Guinea Bissau
Fulani <sup>5</sup>	Cameroon, Benin(Dahomey) Guinea, Nigeria Senegal, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso
Gojas	Liberia
Gonja	Ghana
Hausa	Niger, Nigeria Burkina Faso
Holli	Benin (Dahomey)
Ibibio	Nigeria
Ibo	Nigeria
Ijaw	Nigeria

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Jolah	Gambia
Kabra-Losso	Togo
Kanuri	Niger, Nigeria
Kissi	Guinea, Sierra Leone
Kono	Guinea, Sierra Leone
Kpelle	Liberia
Krim	Sierra Leone
Kuniagi	Guinea
Kwa Kwa	Ivory Coast
Landoumas	Guinea, Sierra Leone
Lebu	Senegal
Lobi	Burkina Faso
Madyako	Guinea Bissau

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<sup>4</sup> Fula ,Fulani, Tucolor and Peulhs are similar ethnic groups

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Manons	Guinea
Mende	Sierra Leone Guinea Bissau
Mina	Togo
Moors	Mali
Moshi-Dagomba	Ghana, Burkina Faso
Mossi	Mali, Burkina Faso
Nalous	Guinea
Nzima	Ghana
Peulhs	Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Benin (Dahomey)
Pilapila	Benin(Dahomey)
Senufo	Ivory Coast, Mali, Burkina Faso
Serer	Senegal
Sombas	Benin (Dahomey)

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<sup>5</sup> The Fulani are probably in more countries .than listed

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Sonraig	Mali
Susu	Guinea
Tuareg <sup>6</sup>	Mali, Niger Burkina Faso
Temne	Sierra Leone
Tukolor	Senegal
Twi	Ghana, Togo
Vai	Liberia Sierra Leone
Wolof	Gambia, Senegal
Yoruba	Benin(Dahomey) Nigeria

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<sup>6</sup> You see Tuaregs in many West African countries. They are known for their jewelry, the most famous is the Cross of Agadez

How to guide for traveling and tracing roots to Africa.

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