

Spring 2013

The Teaching of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and it's Lasting Implications on the African Diaspora

Mara Meyers
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School for International Training
Study Abroad: Ghana
Social Transformation and Cultural Expression
Spring 2013

**The Teaching of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and it's Lasting Implications on the
African Diaspora**

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Abstract

1. Title: The Teaching of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and it's Lasting Implications on the African Diaspora
2. Author: Mara Meyers (mzmeyers@umich.edu, University of Michigan, Residential College)
3. Objectives
 - i. Gain an understanding of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade from the Ghanaian perspective
 - ii. Understand the ways in which the history of slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade are a part of Ghanaians identities today
 - iii. Acquire knowledge regarding Ghanaians understandings of the African Diaspora
 - iv. Explore Ghanaians views on the history of slavery as compared to African Americans perspectives on slavery
4. Methodology: For this research I used a versatile approach. I observed and taught two Social Studies classes at a school in Cape Coast, both of which were of relevance to my topic. I also interviewed, both formally and informally, various teachers, students, and professionals. For my formal interviews, I came prepared with a set of questions but would allow for the conversation to flow and change directions if needed. For my informal interviews, I spoke more casually with Ghanaians about my topic. For the informal interviews no questions were prepared. I also designed and administered a survey, asking Junior High School Form One students about their knowledge surrounding the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the African Diaspora. Finally, I read two Junior High School Social Studies textbooks, which gave me insight into the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade curriculum.
5. Findings: The data I obtained from my student surveys demonstrated a large gap in knowledge regarding the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. This finding was not surprising when the history of slavery was found to be missing in the Junior High School Social Studies textbooks. Conversely, during my interviews I found that teachers and professionals alike believed that the history of Ghana, and specifically the history of slavery in Ghana, was especially important for children to be learning in school. Although they believed that this history was important because the past always informs the future, many of these professionals did not view slavery as a crucially affecting their lives today. The lack of integration of such a long and powerful history into the lives of Ghanaians today was very different information than what I found regarding this same history of slavery for African Americans' identities. The history of slavery for African Americans is so important that it has pushed many African Americans back to "the motherland" to reclaim their roots and find their identities.
6. Conclusion: The large differences between the importance of the history of slavery for Ghanaians and African Americans alike lie in the different ideologies in both countries that still exist today is very apparent and real. However, the power in uniting the African Diaspora and Ghanaians through the realization of a common history has extreme potential for a tenacious and bright future.

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Acknowledgements

Momma Rose, Papa, Kelvin, Kobe, Nana, Tracy, and Abigail: It is only right that my acknowledgements begin with all of you as each of you started with me on this journey and have been my anchors throughout. I never knew that I could be so comfortable in a house that was not my own and with a family that was not my blood, but the place I have found in your family has given me the security that I needed here in Ghana. Abigail- In the short amount of time that we have gotten to know each other I have grown to see you as the sister I always wanted. You have taught me so many invaluable lessons about strength, perseverance, determination, and love. I will always care for you as my sister.

The Residential College: Thank you for your flexibility and your appreciation of the freedom of learning. Thanks to all of you I have been able to fully appreciate the value in learning from the world.

Yemi, Papa Attah, Kokroko and all of the SIT Staff: Thank you for your guidance and leadership. Thank you for giving all of us both the sensibility of security and the drive for freedom that we needed to learn and thrive.

Nate Dampsey: A big thank you for your guidance and insight. Thank you for keeping tabs on me and helping me to focus and shape my ISP into its final form.

SITers: A warm thank you each of you for creating a cohesive group of people full of a strong individuals with a steady willingness to adventure, relax, learn, and grow. A special shout out to my C.C.C. Thank you for making the ISP as productive as it was relaxing. Our time together will

always be the fondest of memories.

Jasmine: Thank you for your honest unconditional love and support. You are forever my sister and forever my favorite part of Ghana.

To my village of Oguaa: I think about the time I spent in Oguaa every day. The pureness, beauty in simplicity, and honest fortitude that I saw in Oguaa are all lessons that I hope to incorporate into the way I live my life now, and how I will continue to define myself in my future.

Lina, Esther, Priscilla, Matilda, Rose and all of the other beautiful people I came to know during my month in Cape Coast: All of your friendships taught me distinct lessons but together you became my Cape Coast family. 'Thank you' will never fully describe my utter appreciation for everything that you are.

Yaw: The biggest and most heartfelt thank you goes out to you. Once again the purity of Ghanaian hospitality was proved through your commitment to Anya, Annie, and I. Your unexpected kindness and guidance shaped the bulk of my ISP research and for that I will forever be grateful.

Mom and Dad: Mom- Thank you for showing me the world. It is because of you that my adventurous spirit has taken me to Ghana and it is because of you that I was equipped with the skills necessary to thrive on this trip. Dad- Thank you for your pride and trust. Your support always means the world.

Introduction

The conceptualization for my research on the history of slavery in Ghana truly began long before my plane landed in Accra. I have always been interested in the historical implications of institutionalized oppression. In the United States, this has led much of my studies towards entrenched racism against African Americans. In trying to understand why racism is so prevalent and runs so deep in American society, my studies have pointed me towards the origin of this kind of oppression, which naturally at its genesis lies in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. As was so eloquently stated by Saidiya Hartman in her book *Loose Your Mother*, “The time passed had only intensified the injury. History was an open wound, as Jamaica Kincaid writes, that “began in 1492 has come to no end yet” (Hartman, 166). With my studies of African American history in the back of my mind and with slavery in America as the anchor of my interests, the most powerful experience in Ghana for me was the tour of the two slave castles in Cape Coast and Elmina. As can be expected, the tour of these castles was excruciatingly horrific but also unquestionably informative and moving. It was incredibly powerful to be able to smell and touch such an important part of history. After I left the castle, my hands and mind were still tingling from brushing against history and questions unanswered spun wildly in my head. As the bright sun scorched down on the city of Cape Coast it seemed to reveal to me the paradox of this little city on the ocean. I was confused as to how a place and its residents that had for hundreds of years been defined by slavery go on about their days as if the looming presence of the castles did not exist. My questions and confusions led me to a burning fascination with how the people of Cape Coast see the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade shaping their city, and their lives. I was curious to know the way they interpreted the story of slavery, how they had internalized it, and where they saw this history fitting into their lives today.

Along this same vein, I was also curious as to how this potential research could connect to my interests and studies at home. The obvious direct link between Ghana and the United States is found in African Diaspora; a community created by the horrors of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Within this community I was curious to know the links that Ghanaians and African Americans possess as well as the general feeling of Ghanaians towards their brothers and sisters that were stolen from Africa and brought to America.

I see the future of any country located in its children, and my research in Cape Coast was anchored no differently. I decided to explore the ways in which the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade and the African Diaspora were being taught to Junior High School students in Cape Coast, at the scene of the crime and at the catalyst of the future of Ghana.

Methodology

For my research I made use of a multifaceted approach. I used non-participant observation, participant observation, as well as formal and non-formal interviews. My research was focused around the teachings of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Junior High Schools in Cape Coast, Ghana. All of my research was completed in Cape Coast as it is an important historical site for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

I spent three weeks in Cape Coast, from the 11th of April until the 5th of May. During these three weeks I conducted interviews in three different schools: Jacob Wilson Sey Basic School, St. Monica's Anglican School, and St. Nicholas' Anglican School. At Jacob Wilson Sey I was able to observe a Citizenship Class (the equivalent to Social Studies class for Primary School) taught to Class Six. The Citizenship Class that I observed focused on the concept of 'the individual.' At Jacob Wilson Sey I was also able to teach a Social Studies and History class to Junior High School Form 1. This class, co-taught with my fellow SIT colleague, Anya Rosenberg, covered the topics of 'What Makes Ghana Special' focusing on the specific unique

attributes of Ghanaian culture, a topic which led into a discussion about the history of Ghana, the slave trade, and the lasting implications that this trade had in both the Ghana and with the African Diaspora in the United States. The latter part of the lesson about the African Diaspora also focused on the similarities between the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for Independence in Ghana as well as the concept of the overall emancipation of a group of people who were both fighting for equal human rights.

Although I was never able to observe a class being taught about the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade specifically, I had access to two Social Studies textbooks, *Mastering Social Studies for Junior High School*, in which I was told the topic of slavery would be addressed. As Social Studies is the only subject in which Junior High School students would be learning about the history of slavery, both of these resources were extremely helpfully in showing me the kind of information that would be used to inform young students about the history of slave trade in Ghana. In order to gather information regarding the actual knowledge retained from classes on slavery and the Trans-Atlantic, I administered twenty surveys to J.H.S. Forms One, Two, and Three. The questions on my survey were meant to both gather information regarding the specific knowledge students retained about the slave trade as well as the students' knowledge and feelings about the descendants of Africans that were stolen from Africa and brought to America (i.e. African Americans).

Although the survey's were solely meant to gather information regarding what young people actually know and have learned about the history of slavery, I was also interested in learning how important the history of slavery is to Ghanaians in general and especially to the curriculum in schools. In order to understand the importance that is put on the history of slavery, I conducted formal interviews with many of the teachers of the schools I visited. These interviews were meant to give me a better understanding of either the emphasis, or sometimes

lack thereof, put on the teaching of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in schools as well as perspectives on the lasting implications of slavery in Ghana today.

After my research ended in the schools, I needed to anchor my research and soon found myself brought back to the real roots of my project: the slave castles themselves. At the Cape Coast Castle I was able to conduct an interview with one of the tour guides as well as go on two tours of that castle and the Elmina Castle (one with SIT and the other during the summer of 2012 with a different study abroad program run through Michigan State University). Finally, my research brought me to a museum that is being constructed within sight of the Cape Coast Castle. In order to gain information on this museum I conducted an informal interview with a photographer who is involved in the development and establishment of this project.

Challenges and Limitations

There were many challenges and constraints to my research, the largest of which being the conflict of my scheduled research time with the scheduled vacation of the schools. Although the schools were open for classes during the first week of my research (April 15th-April 19th), no schools were holding normal classes as the students had just finished up their exams. Not only did this prevent me from truly becoming established in a school and with one set of teachers and students, it also prevented me from being able to observe any real classes in session. The timing of my research also made it difficult to schedule interviews with teachers as most of them were preoccupied with grading tests. After the first full week of my research in the field all of the schools in Cape Coast vacated. Lucky enough for me, I was still able to visit schools that held study sessions and was therefore still able to conduct interviews with teachers and students.

Another limitation to my research was my inability to build a relationship with the returnee community. This failure was due both to time limitations as well as racial constraints.

By the time I was ready to begin research with the returnee community I was moving on to my last week of research and did not feel as though it would be appropriate or even possible to build a relationship with a community in such a short amount of time. In order to circumvent this situation, I decided to approach a student who was already involved with research in this community. I was quickly warned that due to my being a European American I might not be entirely welcomed by the returnees and it might be a better idea for me to get the information that I needed about this community from another source. This conversation made me realize the reality and consequences of my topic. I concluded that due to their marginalized status in the United States these Black Americans who have returned to Africa might not be eager to speak with a privileged European American about the ever painful and ever open wound of slavery.

Literature Review

It is undeniable that slavery in Africa was in existence long before the arrival of Europeans and the start of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. However, what is equally undeniable is the fact that the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade differed drastically from that of the slavery present in Africa before Europeans, and that those drastic differences had large consequences for all involved; consequences that are still being felt today.

In some ways the framework of slavery that was in existence in Africa before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade began can be seen as similar to that which the Europeans practiced. For both the Europeans and Africans, slaves were viewed as commodities (Perbi, 4). That being said, the slave as a commodity, or more importantly a human being, was treated very differently by Europeans than by Africans. "Slavery as previously practiced [in Africa] did not dehumanize its victims; they were still humans and treated as such, with few exceptions" (Yboah, 37). As this

definition proves, the key difference between the way slaves were viewed and treated in the Western context versus the African context was the definition of a slave as “chattel”. In Ghana, a slave was still regarded as a human being; someone who was still entitled to certain rights and privileges (Perbi, 4). In the West, the slave had no rights or claims at birth (Perbi, 9). The slave in the West was a “genealogical isolate” with no claims or real relation to his or her parents, blood relatives, or any remote ancestors and or descendants (Perbi, 9). In addition, and maybe the most detrimental of all, was that in the West slaves were culturally and legally isolated, making each slave a “social dead person” (Perbi, 9).

Perhaps the most telling quote from Perbi’s chapter on indigenous Ghanaian slavery as compared to Western slavery, was his insight into how the varying definitions and perceptions of slaves and slavery in these two contexts creates confusion when trying to use a definition from one cultural context on another. In trying to theorize the lasting implications of slavery in Ghana as well as in America I realized that although both the Western context of slavery and the Ghanaian context had Europeans in common the perceptions and different definitions of the slave were drastically different. This realization pushed my research towards trying to contextualize how slavery might be perceived differently in Ghana than in the United States. Key insight into the differences between these two contexts was provided by the concept of racism as provided by Dinesh D’Souza’s book *The End of Racism*. Through D’Souza’s book, which focuses on the history, nature, and ultimately the meaning of racism, I was able to see that in the United States “Racism is habitually equated with slavery today because the two practices evolved in America. But in this respect the American experience is historically unique” (D’Souza, 37). D’Souza book also illuminated the fact that “Slavery has often existed without a trace of racism. Conversely, racism can develop and persist in the absence of slavery” (D’Souza, 39).

After understanding how the different definitions of slavery might be interpreted differently in the context of Ghana as compared to that of the United States due to racism, further insight was required to understand the perceived lasting effects of slavery through racism in the United States and how these abiding remains of slavery in America could be compared to a country where racism did not develop at the same time as slavery. In order to understand the importance of racism in the United States as compared to the lack of racism found in Ghana, I re-read two books written by African American returnees in Ghana: *Loose Your Mother* by Saidiya Hartman, and *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* by Maya Angelou. Both books provided invaluable insight as to why the residual effects of the marginalization from slavery in the United States push so many African Americans towards African and specifically Ghana. These books were also able to attest that the stories that Africans and African Americans were learning about slavery, as well as the way that both groups saw the past of slavery still affecting them today were entirely different. Why they were so different was where I saw my research taking me.

The story of slavery fabricated for African Americans had nothing to do with the present struggles of most Ghanaians. What each community made of slavery and how they understood it provided little ground for solidarity. African Americans wanted to regain their African patrimony and to escape racism in the United States. Ghanaians wanted to escape from the impoverishment of the present, and the road to freedom which they most often imagined, was migration to the United States. African Americans entertained fantasies of return and Ghanaians of departure. From where we each were standing, we did not see the same past, nor did we share a common vision of the Promised Land. The ghost of slavery was being conjured to very different ends. (Hartman, 165)

In the end however, my research into literature about the African Diaspora and the ideologies surrounding the justification of slavery, did prove to me that there are definite ancestral and cultural connections both between Africans and African Americans, and also between the two stories of slavery. The largest connection that I found was in the ideology of

slavery. D'Souza in his book about racism makes it clear that just like slavery in the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade slavery in America was created for the purpose of profit, not because of racism; racism and prejudice were ideas that were later introduced to justify the total humiliation and utter oppression of the slaves (D'Souza, 79, 101). "The justification was what later came to be known as the 'doctrine of inherent black inferiority'. The black man, it was claimed, was inherently inferior and could not, therefore, be accorded equality of treatment with the white man" (Yboah, 44). However, just as the way the stories of slavery were conjured for Africans and African Americans in the present, how this ideology was manifesting itself in the two different contexts in the form of continued oppression was where the literature did not answer my questions and where I hoped my research would.

Findings

Ghana's Role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

For hundreds of years before the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, slavery could be found all across Africa. In Ghana, much like in other countries in Africa and even around the world, slaves were considered the property rights of those they worked for (Perbi, 6). However, in contrast with other countries that had slaves, especially those European and American countries, the conceptualization of property rights in Ghana had much more to do with the traditional values of kinship than they did in the Americas thus slaves were not treated as anything less than human beings (Perbi, 6). Unlike in the West, whenever a slave was acquired in Ghana, he or she was integrated into the family (Perbi, 8). The slave in Ghana then became a member of his or her owner's household and a part of the owners' family, lineage, and clan (Perbi, 8). To further amalgamate the integration of the slave into the family unit, slaves in Ghana were always given the name of their owner (Perbi, 8). To summarize this phenomena

Meirs and Kopytoff explain, “What gives African slavery its particular stamp, in contrast to many other slave systems, is the existence of this slavery to kinship continuum” (Perbi, 8).

It is clear that slavery existed in Ghana long before the arrival of Europeans, however, in the year 1440 when the Portuguese first arrived on the shores of the Gold Coast (now known as Ghana) the concept of slavery and the slave shifted away from the indigenous Ghanaian form and took on a new definition, one that would forever change the lives of those slaves and their ancestors to come. Initially, the Portuguese’s intentions of trading with the Gold Coast had no relation to slavery or the buying and selling of human beings; their intentions were originally based solely on the trade of goods. However as time went on and as the power and control over the Gold Coast was passed from the Portuguese to the Dutch, the trading of goods turned into the trading and selling of both goods and more importantly people. The commencement of the trade of humans between Africa, Europe and the Americas began what we now know as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and for four hundred years this slave trade between three different continents ripped countless African nations apart and forever plagued the coast of Ghana (Lovejoy, 19). Although the exact numbers are unknown, this trade of human bodies stole nearly 12,000,000 Africans from Africa and dispersed them all around the world (Lovejoy, 19).

The history of a system this large is on a scale so grand it is nearly impossible to comprehend, and yet Ghanaians can wrap begin to understand this long and complicated history by wrapping their heads around the tangible lasting ramifications that can be seen throughout Ghana today. These palpable remnants of slavery prove the importance of learning to conceptualize and contextualize such a brutal and appalling past.

The Story of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as Told Through Junior High Social Studies Textbooks

According to the Social Studies teacher at Jacob Wilson Sey Basic School, located in Cape Coast, Ghana, slavery is not taught as a subject to students until the Junior High level, when, at that time, it is introduced under the heading of their Social Studies class. As stated in the Social Studies textbook, “Social Studies is the integrated study of the Social Sciences and Humanities to promote effective citizenry” (Jasim). The textbook goes on to explain that Social Studies “is also the study of problems of society. The subject prepares the individual to fit into society by equipping him/her with knowledge about culture and ways of life of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future” (Jasim). With these objectives in mind the entire textbook can be read without one mention of the word slavery (Jasim). The only mention of any aspect of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade comes under the Socio-Economic Development: Tourism, Leisure and Development section where the textbook reveals ‘Why People Go on Tour’ to the slave dungeons and other tourist sites of Ghana (Jasim). The textbook explains that people may “travel to historical sites such as the Elmina Castle [where] tour guides explain many things about the slave trade to tourists” (Jasim, 93). The use of the word ‘tourist’ implies that these sites are solely for foreigners. The textbook later goes on to explain the reason for choosing to talk only about tourists when it says that “most Ghanaians are so pre-occupied with activities to get their daily bread that they do not devote enough time for rest and leisure. Consequently we do not see the value of tourist centers and do not take advantage of them” (Jasim, 90). The textbook therefore declares the significance of the slave castles as only for the use of tourists as Ghanaians do not have the time or money to put any time into visiting these tourist sites.

For the J.H.S. Form One Social Studies textbook, the lack of information regarding the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is even more frightening. The only mention of slavery in the Junior

High School Social Studies Textbook for J.H.S. Form One can be found on page 24, where a simple statement says, “The slaves were kept in dungeons in the Castle which were poorly ventilated” (Jasim, 24). No other mention of slavery or the slave trade can be found throughout the rest of the textbook. When asked about the curriculum surrounding slavery, the Social Studies teacher at Jacob Wilson Sey explained to me that slavery is most focused on in Form Two. This may explain the lack of focus on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in the Form One textbook, however, the information provided in the Form Two textbook is still terribly slim.

The most interesting finding from the information, or lack thereof, of these two textbooks is that the goal of the textbook itself is to “promote effective citizenry...by equipping [Ghanaian citizens] with knowledge about culture and ways of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future” (Jasim). If the goal of the book is truly to make the most educated and able Ghanaian citizens and the long history of slavery and slave trade that traumatized Ghana for four hundred years is barely even mentioned in these textbooks, then I had my first clue into the lack of emphasis on slavery and its lasting implications for Ghanaians and their identities.

Ghanaian’s Views on Learning about the History of Slavery in Ghana

After reading the Junior High School Form One and Form Two textbooks and seeing how little emphasis is put on the history of slavery in the curriculum, I decided it would be important to ask the teachers if they personally believed that Ghana’s historic involvement in the slave trade was important for students to learn. Almost every single teacher I interviewed responded with a resounding yes and nearly all stressed the importance of children learning

about their past because of the lessons the past has to offer for the present and future. As one teacher eloquently elaborated,

It is always good to learn something from the past so that you build on it and so that you don't make the same mistakes that those people made before. That is why it is important for them to learn things from the past, not necessarily to think about the pain and all that they went through, but at least there should be a lesson they are learning from there so that they know how to take the steps towards the future (Brown, St. Monica's JHS).

Throughout my research, and even my time spent living in Ghana, it is very apparent to me that Ghanaians are proud of their history and feel very strongly that every Ghanaian should be informed about the history of his or her country. I never met a Ghanaian who did not know the year Ghana gained independence, nor did anyone stutter when asked whom the first president of Ghana was. Even in Jacob Wilson Sey a teacher's seven year old daughter recited both of these facts in perfect English and with hardly any prompt (Koufie, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Maya Angelou in her book *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* highlights the importance of Nkrumah's presidency to Ghanaians: "His statements were memorized and repeated in the litany of teachers and students" (Angelou, 77). The attention on Ghana's history surrounding independence is clearly accentuated in Ghana, but the long, dark past before Nkrumah's stirring revolution for "freedom" is less easily recalled. During my time at Jacob Wilson Sey I was able to test Junior High School Forms One, Two, and Three students on Ghana's history before Nkrumah. I administered twenty surveys asking the students about Ghana's history in connection to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and their opinion on any potential lasting effects of this tragedy on Ghana today. The answers were scattered and disjointed. Out of the twenty surveys that were administered only four students knew that slavery in Ghana lasted for four hundred years. The other answers ranged from thinking that slavery lasted for 7 up to 2000 years. Nearly all of the students knew that Africans were the ones enslaved, and while they knew that the British were those who persecuted the slaves they

also neglected to acknowledge the entire history of the Dutch and Portuguese's persecution. Most students had some idea of what went on in the slave dungeons as the answers ranged from "they were beaten," to "severe war", but when it came to why Ghanaians were enslaved nearly all of the answers pertained to the British wanting the rich resources of Ghana such as gold and cocoa, while only four acknowledged that the British wanted to control the Ghanaians (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Only one child responded that it was because "we [Ghanaians] were poor and had no education" (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). This answer hints to deeply rooted beliefs that there were benefits to the utter control and domination of the British such as education and religion.

Although some of the facts the children gave on the surveys hold truth, when it came to applying this information towards an open discussion about the lasting effects of slavery and how these pertain to Ghana's present and future, the students were unable to give any answers. When asked about what they saw as the indelible consequences of slavery and colonialism on Ghanaians and Ghana today, not one child could come up with an answer that was negative (Form One Social Studies Class, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). The only answers they could provide had to do with the positive outcomes of colonialism, which they saw as education, hospitals, and religion (Form One Social Studies Class, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). The question was then rephrased to ask what slavery took away from Ghana and Ghanaians, and the only answer that was provided was that some Africans were taken from Ghana to live and work in other countries overseas (Form One Social Studies Class, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

What is interesting about these findings is the paradox between how emphasized the relevance of learning the history of Ghana, and specifically the history of slavery, was by the teacher's at Jacob Wilson Sey and how little their students were actually able to retain about the history itself in addition to their inability to apply this knowledge to their world today. As one teacher succinctly stated, "It is very, very important for children to know about the history of

Ghana...to know the reasons of why certain things are happening now and in the future”, and yet there was little to no information that the children were actually able to apply to understanding how the past is shaping Ghana in the present (Franpong, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Although the students could not see any ways that the longstanding institution of slavery was affecting Ghana today they were able to identify the fact that Africans were stolen from Africa and brought to other countries to work. This piece of knowledge points to some awareness of the African Diaspora, a community that each of them have connections to. During the history lesson that Anya and I co-taught to this mixed class of Junior High School students, we asked the students about the descendents of African slaves, those who make up the African Diaspora. When asked if they had ever heard of African Americans their faces were blank and their mouths remained shut. When asked about Black Americans, however, they nodded and gave a quiet yes that they did in fact know who Black Americans were (Form One Social Studies Class, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). When asked on the survey if they had heard of Black Americans just over half answered that they had but when they were questioned about whether or not they felt at all similar to Black Americans only four out of the twenty surveys answered that they did because “they [African Americans] were Africans who left to America” (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Although knowledge of Africans being taken to other countries to live was present, there was an absence of knowledge regarding what happened to the Africans that were brought to the Americas. Interestingly enough, of those students who responded on the survey that they had visited the slave castles before, most of them knew that once brought to America, Africans were forced to work very hard on plantations and farms (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). For the students who had never visited the slave castles before, only two knew that these Africans became workers overseas (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). There was a disconnect however in these answers as the students showed an absence in knowledge that their African ancestors were brought to the Americas not just to work but to be enslaved once more (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). This lack

of knowledge was exemplified through the students' answers about slavery existing in other countries besides Ghana. Out of the twenty surveys, twelve responded that they had never heard of slavery existing in any other countries (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Of those who said they had heard of it existing in other countries only three listed it existing in the United States (Student Survey, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

It may not be surprising to find this lack of recognition of slavery existing in other countries when the history of slavery in Ghana is hardly known at all. The world cannot expect Ghanaian students to have much knowledge of the Diaspora and its lasting implications overseas if they do not first understand the history of slavery in their own country and its continuing significance for their world today. As was best stated by a Cape Coast Tour Guide:

The whole story of slave trade should be made compulsory to every school child so that every Ghanaian can know his history. Because if you know that history you can learn from that history and create a better future. But if we do not know our history it seems we are lost. We don't know where we are coming from; we don't know where we are going. So if I had the power I can say that slave trade can be compulsory from Basic School to Junior High School (Tetteh, Cape Coast Castle).

Lasting Effects of Slavery

Although many of the students that were surveyed did not fully grasp the concept of slavery potentially having incessant consequences for Ghana, many of the teachers made allusions to the importance of learning about the past because of its relevance to the future, and so I decided that they, instead of the students, might be able to provide me with some further insight into the relevance of slavery for Ghana and Ghanaians today. The answers that I received were relatively consistent. All of the teacher's responses about the lasting consequences of slavery can be broken up into three categories: a loss of culture, continued mental enslavement, and a loss of resources and man power.

In nearly every interview conducted with teachers, the loss of resources and the loss of able-bodied and physically strong men were mentioned. One teacher at Jacob Wilson Sey, Isaac Franpong, said that “They [the Europeans] capitalized on our ignorance in certain aspects. Our gold, human and other natural resources were stolen” (Franpong, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Another teacher, Christopher Sayoe, at Jacob Wilson Sey, mentioned the consequences of slavery as the following: man power was taken away, population was depleted and Africa was left with only the feeble Africans (Sayoe, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Although many teachers were able to identify a loss of resources (both human and natural), only one interviewee was able to tie this loss of resources to any current phenomena transpiring in Ghana today.

Underdevelopment is one major effect of slavery. Simply because for 400 years our people that were able to work were taken away. Development is a process not an event. So if they [those that were stolen from Africa] were to be here for 400 years they could have done something. That would have made Africa a better place (Tetteh, Cape Coast Castle).

In addition to the observation of a loss of man power and resources, many of those interviewed also saw the continued hold and power of the West over Ghana as a lasting consequence of slavery. “Our culture has been if not totally castrated and they are trying to bring in a new culture which is not helping our people because we cannot develop without our culture. We cannot develop with a different culture” (Tetteh, Cape Coast Castle). As an example of the manifestation of a loss of Ghanaian culture, the topic of clothing was mentioned by many. “Even the way we dress. I see sometimes when you people visit us you take delight in wearing our local dresses because you see something better in it, but right now we don’t see anything better in our own culture. We don’t even promote it” (Ampomah, St. Monica’s JHS). Furthermore, many of those interviewed took the concept of a loss of culture as a sign of the current and growing presence of the West and interpreted this presence as continued enslavement, or more acutely mental enslavement. As one teacher pointed out “Though this

time they don't sell us, they don't carry us in chains, but we are still being chained" (Ampomah, St. Monica's JHS). Ironically the concept of continued mental enslavement as a lasting effect of slavery is a notion that Ghana is very aware of resisting and can even be found in the Ghana National Anthem "Help us to resist oppressors' rule/ With all our will and might forevermore (Ghanaian National Anthem). All of these findings point to some form of cultural enslavement, but the mentality of cultural slavery was best clarified by Mark Tetteh, a tour guide at the Cape Coast Castle in Cape Coast, Ghana.

I believe we can learn from history and from history we can build a better future, but unfortunately what is happening today in the world it is even getting worse than the slave trade. Because slave trade as it is it lasted for 400 years here on the continent. It was a crime against one race to the benefit of another race. For 400 years able African men and women who were to work and develop the continent were uprooted to develop other places and today those places are better than Africa and now what is happening is even worse simply because there is there are so called powers in the world today are still bullying the smaller ones. Putting them in tight corners—I mean, economic slavery, political slavery, mental slavery where they are poaching our able men and women who are able to develop the Western world. Is it intentional? Nothing has really changed (Tetteh, Cape Coast Castle).

However, just as with the loss of resources, when it came to the application of the observation that the West still has a hold on Ghana and Ghanaians, none of those interviewed could point to any ways in which this presence of the West would ever be broken or if it even should be broken. Only one interview alluded to how Ghana may become free from this mental enslavement perpetuated by the West. Isaac Franpong, a Mathematics teacher at Jacob Wilson Sey JHS, said that the key to the success of Ghana how was to "Accept who we are and try to get out of where we are. We have to be self-dependent. The little that we have, we can even build on that and we will get there" (Franpog, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

Views on Black Americans

The implication of Ghanaians lack of knowledge of slavery in their own country has detrimental effects not only for the knowledge of their own history, but also on their overall awareness of the larger community that they belong to: the African Diaspora. Saidiya Hartman, an African American returnee, came to this startling realization during her trip to Ghana.

I had presumed that the black world shared a thread of connection or a common chord of memory based upon this, our tragic past. In this assumption, I was proved wrong. I didn't experience what Ralph Ellison described as the "identity of passions," which connected the black world through our common suffering and history of struggle. I soon found out that most people didn't have a clue as to the scope of the transatlantic slave trade and didn't imagine that it had any lingering effects, which made them no different from the average American (Hartman, 73).

The divide between the common struggle that Ghanaians and African Americans fought for during independence and the Civil Rights Movement is an interesting one. If Ghanaians do not know about or cannot see these two struggles for human rights as one in the same then how will they at all feel as though the residual effects of these movements' presences in both countries are at all similar? And if Africans do not feel as though the struggles that they have faced are at all similar to those that Black Americans have faced, how can these two communities be united as one?

When asked about any lingering effects of slavery in the lives of Black Americans in the United States many of those that I interviewed could not see Black Americans as concerned by anything other than wealth and success. Not one of the teachers that I interviewed saw racism as existing in the United States. One teacher told me that "The law deals with you whether you are white or black. There is no discrimination when it comes to the law" (Ampomah, St. Monica's JHS). Another teacher stated that "Black Americans have a lot to offer the nation and they are being given equal rights to the whites" (Ampomah, St. Monica's JHS). In fact, most responses I received told me that the lives of Black Americans were somehow superior then those of

Ghanaians, “Simply because life there is better than this place because America is more developed than Africa, for that matter Ghana, so life there is better than this place. They are doing better than I am. Life there is better but I don’t envy them because their ancestors suffered for it” (Tetteh, Cape Coast Castle). Only one Junior High School student understood racism in the United States, but her knowledge about discrimination in America came not from formal education but from a television show (Amoah, St. Nicholas’ JHS). In the end the only potentially detrimental effect of slavery that Ghanaians were able to see Black Americans suffering from was a loss of culture.

The only effects that the Africans in the Diaspora have is the loss of their culture and their dignity and their respect and their names. That is the difference. Look, here in Africa, for that matter Ghana, we have our culture that makes us unique, our way of life, our names, and our language (Tetteh, Cape Coast Castle).

They have lost their roots, they have lost their parents (Sayoe, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

They had to assimilate. They had to throw away their kente cloth for that of the bow-tie (Sayoe, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

The realization that Black Americans may be suffering from an absence of their roots and ultimately their culture is huge. It was the first and only acknowledgement of those interviewed to see a lasting effect of slavery in the United States.

Feelings Surrounding the Castles/ Pride in the Castles

A loss of culture was clearly the paramount belief that Ghanaians were able to illuminate as a consequence of slavery in the United States. As a result of this acknowledgement, many Ghanaians believe African Americans are returning to Cape Coast and visiting the slave castles in order to understand their roots and begin to reclaim their original culture (whatever that may actually be). The association then that these returning African Americans have with the slave castles points to the fact that the slave castles hold very important weight in defining the

beginning of a reclaiming of identity and culture, something that Africans and African Americans alike feel as though African Americans have lost. The emotional weight and strong associations of identity with the slave dungeons then is very different between Ghanaians and Black Americans. In a powerful quote in Saidiya Hartman's book, she describes the feelings that Ghanaians have towards Americans and America in general as this: "In Ghana, they joked that if a slave ship bound for America docked off the coast today so many Ghanaians would volunteer for the passage that they would stampede one another trying to get on board" (Hartman, 170). Hartman elaborates on this quote by explaining that just as the tour guide at the Cape Coast Castle saw it, the two worlds and two struggles of Americans and Ghanaians are nearly incomparable.

The story of slavery fabricated for African Americans had nothing to do with the present struggles of most Ghanaians. What each community made of slavery and how they understood it provided little ground for solidarity. African Americans wanted to regain their African patrimony and to escape racism in the United States. Ghanaians wanted to escape from the impoverishment of the present, and the road to freedom which they most often imagined, was migration to the United States. African Americans entertained fantasies of return and Ghanaians of departure. From where we each were standing, we did not see the same past, nor did we share a common vision of the Promised Land. The ghost of slavery was being conjured to very different ends (Hartman, 165).

A teacher at St. Nicholas Anglican School neatly quantified the association of Ghanaians with the slave castles when she said, "we don't attach any importance to it" (Pa, St. Nicholas' JHS). This statement about not attaching any importance to the slave castles is further proven to be true for Ghanaians when looking back at the Junior High School Social Studies textbook that says, "Though our government obtains much revenue from the tourism industry, many Ghanaians do not show interest in visiting tourist sites" (Jasim, 93). The textbook goes on to explain that these lack of interest is a result of misconception of tourism, that tourism "is a pleasure for the rich", poverty meaning that many Ghanaians "do not have the means to visit places of scenic interest for tourism and leisure", lack of appreciation for beauty, "people

[Ghanaians] do not see anything special about scenic places of interest that they must spend money to visit such places”, lack of appreciation for value of leisure, “Unfortunately, many Ghanaians do not see the value of leisure. People therefore consider leisure and tourism as a waste of time and resources”, and insufficient information and education, “many people have little or no knowledge and information about the importance of tourism in their life. They are in the dark; probably due to the lack of education and publicity about the prospects in the tourism industry” (Jasim, 93). The government of Ghana has further recognized the importance of these historical edifices, as in 1993 the Ministry of Tourism was established. The Ministry’s goal is to “develop, promote, and coordinate all tourism activities in Ghana.” (Ghana Tourism). Under the Ghana Tourism section of Ghana’s Tourism Homepage website, the slave castles and forts are described as being “universally recognized” (Ghana Tourism). In fact, the website goes on to say that several of the castles are now listed on UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Ghana Tourism). The Ministry of Tourism further recognizes the international importance of these edifices as it has recently been given a new mandate: diasporan relations (Ghana Tourism). The mission statement of the mandate for Diasporan relations is “sustainable relationship with the Diaspora for resource mobilization and investments” (Ghana Tourism). Hartman describes the growth of this tourism industry in Ghana as only to help guide the African American story and not at all for the purposes of Ghanaians.

Under the stewardship of Shell Oil, USAID, and a consortium of North American universities, the Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism and the Museum and Monuments Board crafted a story for the ten thousand black tourists who visited the country every year hungering for knowledge of slave ancestors. Tourism provided a ready response with a tale of the Atlantic slave trade as a distinctly African American story, with no mention of the expansion and increasing severity of African slavery in response to the Atlantic trade or of destitute commoners (Hartman, 162-163).

Hartman later explains why Ghanaians have a lack of interest in the story of slavery; as the only goal of tours of the slave castles is to make Ghana rich.

Few of the tour operators, docents, and guides put any stock in the potted history of the “white man’s barbarism” and the “crimes against humanity” that they marketed to black tourists or believed the Atlantic trade had anything to do with them. They only hoped that slavery would make them prosperous...For Ghana, the slave route was a desperate measure to generate needed revenue and to develop a viable economy (Hartman, 163).

The focus of a tourist industry about the castles as beneficial for Ghana is something that Ghanaians are just as aware of as Hartman, although they do not see it as negatively. In fact, one of my most surprising findings during my research was how positively Ghanaians interpreted the tourist aspect of the slave castles. There was much pride to be found in the evidence that people around the world are coming to Ghana to experience the slave castles and to learn about the history of slavery first hand.

The castles alone serve as a remarkable edifice in our region here. We have been blessed. That is why we have been seeing people like you—traveling all across the big sea to see the castle, so that when you go back to your country that castle that you have seen you will share it with others. You also become a store of information so that others can learn from you (Sayoe, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

Out of the forty or so castles and forts in West Africa, seventeen of them can be found in Ghana (Sayoe, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS). Although the lasting psychological and emotional remnants of these castles are huge, the lasting historical educational aspects are seen by many Ghanaians as even larger. “The Cape Coast Castle has attracted tourists. The money that is being collected is being put towards schools, roads, [and] so many other infrastructure things” (Sayoe, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

Many of those I interviewed took this tourist initiative one step further by highlighting an interest in having African American tourist come back invest in Ghana. “I’m trying to see them invest in their motherland. There are a lot of black...uh...black...African Americans who have money in the United States. If they really want to tell that they are part of us then let’s see them.

Let's see them coming in and establishing what they have established over there [in the United States] because we have the resources" (Franpong, Jacob Wilson Sey JHS).

As was found in my interviews, much of the lack of sentiment surrounding the castles is related to the failure to separate the castles from all other tourist destinations in Cape Coast. Throughout many of my interviews teacher's associated school trips to the castles with school trips to other tourist destinations in Cape Coast such as the Kankum National Park. This is no different than how the castles were mentioned under the tourism section of the J.H.S. Form 2 Social Studies Textbook; again right along side of the other tourist destinations that Cape Coast and Ghana have to offer. This only further congeals a disassociation of the castles with an emotional history while at the same time solidifying the castle's place in the present as only a tourist location that can be used to generate revenue for the country. The castles are not found to be as profoundly related with Ghana's history for the purpose of Ghanaians to know and understand their roots, rather the castles are marketed towards tourists and in particular to African Americans on a pilgrimage to understand their ancestral heritage.

Conclusion

The greatest shock living in Cape Coast is the ghostliness of it all. The ghosts of slaves long gone still remain and the physical fortress of slavery continues to stand tall and proud. Just like the ghosts of slaves long gone, the reality of the institution of slavery and its perpetual consequences lingers as a ghost; not present or overbearing, but a distant figure that cannot be fully seen, grasped, or understood. Tourists and Ghanaians in Cape Coast have this in common—they move about the castle as if they have no idea of the phantom presence of crimes that were committed just behind the cleanly white washed walls. The dichotomy of a forgotten past as life quietly and seemingly normally moves on in Cape Coast, while so many

African Americans come clamoring back to the shores of Ghana looking to understand a past they have never forgotten is inextricably intriguing. Coming to Cape Coast I was unfamiliar with how a country could not see slavery shaping present day identities. As much of my studies have focused on white privilege, human rights, oppression, and systemic inequalities in American society, I never saw a life that had not been shaped by slavery. Coming to Ghana and seeing that slavery is not an integral part of Ghanaian identity continues to shock me. Through reading, my own research, and observation over these past three and a half months, I have come to realize that Ghanaians have not had the time to integrate this history into their present because they have not had time to deal with it. Unlike many Americans (especially those privileged enough to travel back to Africa), Ghanaians were more preoccupied with living day to day than they were about living in the past.

The danger in not dealing with a history of four hundred years is that one will never be able to live fully in the present without acknowledging the past. Although Ghanaians might be more concerned with finding their daily bread today than they are about slavery, it might be beneficial for Ghana to look at how the struggle for money today has historical implications. In the United States, the strong focus on the current struggles of African Americans as it relates to the historically derived but currently institutionalized ideologies of slavery and racism is exactly what has brought African Americans to Ghana in the first place. Although those of the African Diaspora and Ghanaians have different current struggles, they do have a common history of strife, struggle, and perseverance, and if the two groups were able to come together and realize the similarities there is no way to tell what potential this union could have."Union among you, will strike tremendous terror to the receiver of stolen persons. But do not petition, for it is degrading to human nature to petition your oppressors."- Robert Wedderburn (Hartman, 167).

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Name:

School:

Class:

Age:

1. Have you ever visited the Cape Coast Slave Castle or the Elmina Castle? If the answer is yes, how old were you? During your tour of the castle, and after the tour was over, how did you feel?
2. How many years ago was slavery?
3. How many years did slavery last for?
4. Who was enslaved?
5. Why were they enslaved?

6. What do you think happened in the slave dungeons of the Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle?
7. Where were slaves taken when they left Cape Coast Castle and Elmina on boats?
8. What happened to the slaves once they arrived at their new destinations?
9. Have you ever heard of black Americans?
10. Do you feel that black Americans are similar to you at all? Why?
11. Do you think black Americans are happier in America than you are here, in Ghana? Why?
12. Have you ever heard of slavery existing in any other countries? Where?

Figure 1: Student Survey (for J.H.S. Forms One-Three)