

School for International Training

College Semester Abroad - Ghana

(Arts & Culture)

Fall 1998

Where the Chilly Winds Don't Blow:

African Americans Return to Ghana

Zelle Bonney

(Williams College)

Project Advisor: Mr. Kofi Middleton Mends

NAFTI

Academic Directors: Dr. Olayomi Tinuoye

Ms. Ann Pobi

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Abstract

Indeed, the idea of going back to Africa was the ultimate option of the man who ceased to hope that as a Negro he might still be able to live decently as a free man in the land of the free. There were always other options: endurance, accommodation' Uncle Tomism, Samboism, sloth, fantasy, religion, or violence.

He could escape to some kind of freedom lying beyond the white man's power to deny it, whether into some secret self, into the ghetto, or as a wistful dream, away somewhere all the way across the sea back to Africa (Isaacs, 1963, p.116).

The major purpose of my Independent Study Project is to create an audio visual medium to chronicle the current perspectives of African Americans living in Ghana. This paper serves as a supplement to the video documentary and is organized as a discussion between those African Americans interviewed, as well as accounts from the tour guides at Cape Coast and Elmina and Ghanaians. The discussion is also supported by books written on the topic.

The paper focuses on three main issues: the meaning of who participated in the slave trade, who our anger may be directed towards and where our energy is to be focused, and how the African in the Americas and Ghana is to progress. The paper follows a pattern of recounting the views and ideas that were shared among those interviewed, accompanied by literature on the subject, and asking given the perspective, what questions are left unanswered.

Acknowledgments

This project was not undertaken simply to learn about perspectives of African Americans in Ghana but to develop a fuller understanding of self by those who have a higher level of Black consciousness than I have achieved. Therefore I would first like to thank God for blessing me with the opportunity to make this journey and for leading and guiding me towards the right people and the historical places that have helped to inform how I plan to live my future.

Thank you also to:

My mentor Dr. Olayemi Tinuoye who believed in me and gave me the self-confidence and knowledge I needed to continue. You were my backbone; the reason why my project stands.

Maxwell Addo and Judith for being the two people responsible for making the video possible.

Rabbi Kohain Nathanya Halevi for preaching the truth. Thank you for saying what you believe in directly. You helped put my emotions into words.

Dr. Robert Lee for making me think about why I am where I am now. Thank you for being a father friend. I could listen to you impart life lessons for as many hours as there are days.

John and Mary Ellen Ray for inspiring critical thinking about our future considering our past. I hope my future husband and I complement each other the way you two do. Both of you appear to be one.

Dr. Mulana, Eric Jones, Brian Muhammad, Vera Muhammad, Phil Moore and

Ann Pobi for your willingness to help and your time.

The Adovor family. I love you sooooo much. When I was tired or frustrated you made me forget any problems I was having by the enjoyment of your company. I never knew any family to be so completely loving and nurturing. My favorite moments were shared with you. I will miss you dearly but am relieved to know that I will see you more than a few times in the States. Thank you for being my home away from home and my house will surely be yours upon your arrival in Washington.

The tour guides at Cape Coast and Elmina for giving detailed accounts of our past.

Mr. Kofi Mends for being available to assist me with either advice or contacts for my project.

Mr. Joseph Quarcoo for understanding my financial situation and still giving me the time I needed to create a finished piece. We worked well together and I appreciated your patience and desire for perfection.

SweetPea Video for having the equipment to transfer NTSC to PAL at an affordable cost. I would not have had an edited piece without your assistance.

Introduction

Confused inaudible mental utterances would permit me alone to glimpse at reasons for my emotions. They were; inarticulate sporadic thoughts constantly in flight, fleeing from recognition and understanding, causing my inability to write. What I have felt I am attempting to allow you to see.

I must preface my paper by saying that I am no longer writing for any person other than myself Selfish and yet honest; you and I are peering into myself with no apologies for what we might find together. These words printed in black and white represent not only my feelings but are the staunch colors that have influenced all my emotions and pervaded my thoughts since the Whites and I, the sole Black became "comfortable" with each other the week of 27 SEP 98, in the village of Onwe. Why separate and lose the identity of each person only to divide us into colored categories? Simply because my color, their color, and the nature of our actions were the only consistencies I thought I was certain of.

I witnessed the arrogance, listened to the cynical and crude remarks and at the same time watched as smiling Black faces chased after or stood under the condescending noses of the Whites in my group. The young children in the village of Onwe did not know these whites, did not know me either and defined me as such, but nonetheless loved us, admired us, and longed to be in our company simply because we were "obroni." What did that word really mean and who taught those children to run unguarded in faith, in love and in awe towards "obroni" upon meeting him?

The last night in the village I cried in anger and sadness. Not because the Whites frustrated me to the point of tears but rather because we were leaving the village and I knew those children did not know what the Whites really thought of them. They would go on loving "obroni" even though "obroni" had at times directly insulted them; however because of the language difference they would never know what was said. I could not tell them there but I made sure I told the whites, "This is our last supper in this village together and this is also the very last time that I will not say anything when you insult my people to their faces." Of course my claims were denied, but be assured that although the children in the village of Onwe may continue to run towards "obroni" upon his arrival, the "obronis" in my group will speak in a guarded tone, questioning whether what they are saying is appropriate in my presence.

I will refrain from delving deeper into my own personal issues but before we continue I must admit I questioned whether another paper, film or piece of literature needed to be written about the relationship between Blacks and Whites by another Black American. Some have tired of the topic even I have at times, resolved to be with those whom I felt comfortable; those who were always a shade of Black.

However this paper along with the documentary are not just about Black and White, and certainly not written or produced for me to vent - although keep in mind, "The black artist who creates without interjecting a note of anger is creating not as a black man, but as an American (Gayle, 1971, p.xv)." - but rather speaks towards the relationship between the two colors and questions the history between the European, the African and the African transported to the Americas during the European slave trade.

Although now you are only hearing my voice as we move along you will also be

hearing the voices of Rabbi Kohain Nathanya Halevi, Dr. Robert E. Lee, John and Mary Ellen Ray and a few Ghanaians. We will all be speaking to you but at times their words will speak for me. Issues included for further discussion in this paper are the meaning of who participated in the slave trade, who our anger may be directed towards and where our energy should be focused, and a discussion on how the Black man in America and Ghana is to progress. Note that this paper serves only as a supplement to the video documentary, which is twenty four minutes extracted from five hours of tape.

Methodology

I began my project with the idea of talking to as many African Americans as possible that lived in the Accra and Cape Coast areas. I was thinking of creating a video yearbook with soundbites that were captivating and either informed one of the yearbook personality's reason for coming, qualm with America, outlook on life or personal commentary on Ghana or the slave forts at Cape Coast or Elmina. The yearbook would e served the purpose of showing who had actually come to Ghana to live and to see if re were any problems, issues, or ideas that were common among the African Americans here. The documentary would have followed a pattern of building on the perspective of one Diasporan to the next, climaxing with a critical issue or idea that was prevalent among those interviewed.

After talking with my director, Dr. Olayemi Tinuoye, I was convinced to reform idea and conduct a case study of three to four African Americans in order to get more depth interviews. The idea of less is more became appealing considering ISP time restraints, scheduling, video equipment costs, and editing expenses. It was to my advantage to interview fewer people whom I thought had stories to tell; I would be producing history.

I first had to find a camera, which I must admit was an ordeal. I was referred to person who referred me to that person; that person told me his camera was faulty and referred me to another person. I eventually asked my advisor Mr. Kofi Mendis if he had suggestions on camera rentals and he mentioned someone who had a camera and loaned it out for 30,000 cedis per day. This was rather expensive so I sought to fine

another way to acquire a camera and ventured to the Audio Visual Department where Maxwell Addo who was my savior in many ways, loaned me a Hi-8 Sony camcorder for two weekends at no cost.

After securing a camera I went to the W.E.B. Dubois Center's administrative office and spoke with Phil Moore who gave me a list of Black Americans whom he thought would be interested in the project. I had also accumulated names and numbers from functions on the University of Legon's campus and through other African Americans whether they be students or professionals who would mention contacts upon finding out the project I was attempting to conduct. I had acquired numerous names and numbers and then proceeded to make phone calls to tell the potential interviewees about my project and to ask them if they would be interested. I informed them that before I brought the video camera I would give them a chance to meet me to get a fuller understanding of what the entire project was about. This initial meeting served two functions: one as a screening interview to see whether I thought further discussions would be necessary and two, to make sure we both felt comfortable with one another.

I had met with several different people including Dr. Mulana who is a writer and educator. I sincerely wanted him to be a part of the video after hearing him speak at a Pan Africanist Conference on campus. He however declined because of several reasons: he is creating a petition on reparations, he has been the target of violent threats and actions based on his work, and he was a participant in interviews before and his ideas and work were not given proper credit to him but rather to the interviewer. It was a disappointment to me not to be able to interview Dr. Mulana but I accepted his decline from my offer and his willingness to help me in any other way with an understanding of

his reasons and continued support for his petition and future books. I also met with Eric Jones, Chairperson of The African American Association of Ghana, Brian Muhammad of the Nation of Islam's branch in Accra and a few others. However, I chose to interview Dr. Robert E. Lee who was the first dentist in Ghana and among the first Black Americans to come to Ghana upon Kwame Nkrumah's request for Diasporans to return and teach Ghanaians skills. I also selected John and Mary Ellen Ray who complemented each other so well and told vivid captivating stories that were both personal and historical. They also raised a lot of questions about why we as Africans have not moved forward considering our past, which we had long debates and discussions over. Considering Dr. Lee's wealth of knowledge about the past I thought it necessary to interview John and Mary Ellen ray to question the future.

After scheduling appointments with Dr. Lee and the Rays, I traveled to Cape Coast to videotape a tour of the castle dungeons there and at Elmina. I had prepared for some of the discussions to focus on slavery and the impact of the European slave trade and wanted to have some footage from the slave forts to insert into the documentary. I thought it would be a vital portion of the video serving as a reference point, support or denial of statements made by the interviewees, and a visual reminder of the origin of Blacks in America.

While there I wanted to meet with a few of the Black Americans whom I had previously met in Cape Coast during our educational tour. Although I met the absence of One Africa and Imakus, I was able to reacquaint myself with Rabbi Kohain Nathanya Halevi who agreed upon a few minutes notice to be interviewed. His interview was a success and I found myself saying "Make it plain," inaudibly of course and smiling

inwardly as he spoke. I felt his emotion. He was direct, charismatic and real.

After all the interviews were videotaped, I set about trying to find a place to edit. I attempted to edit in the Audio Visual Department at Legon but as the method of editing from VHS deck to deck proved inexact and because of my inexperience operating with that method, sloppy, I chose to find professional equipment. Maxwell Addo who offered the audio visual facilities for my use, referred me to SweetPea Video in Kaneshie. I traveled to SweetPea Video but decided not to edit there because their graphics machine was broken, meaning I would not be able to write credits. Again I decided to ask my advisor for advice.

Mr. Mends referred me to the Dubois Center where I was to meet with Mr. Ameyi who could offer help and equipment at the affordable cost of thirty thousand cedis to edit per day. Although I anticipated editing at the Dubois Center, the machines were faulty and Mr. Ameyi suspected it would take me twice as long as it normally would to edit there. He then graciously decided to take me to The Ghana Institute of Journalism's Media Center where he introduced me to Mr. Joseph Quarcoo who said that I could direct while he edited the video. He also assured me that all his equipment was working. His fee was fifteen thousand cedis per hour; despite the cost we agreed to work together within my budget and Mr. Quarcoo helped me produce *Where the Chilly Winds Don't Blow: A Documentary on African Americans in Ghana*

Who Sold Us Out

Africans were willful participants in the slave trade. From the tours at Cape Coast and Elmina, and from accounts during interviews with Ghanaians, Black Americans were sold by people of our own skin color. The conditions in the dungeon and on the slave ship that caused our deaths in the millions were designed by the European, but our fate of whether we were to meet distant shores was the result of our people's decision to trade our bodies for goods.

You know what I told her, I said that's why your family was sold into slavery. You see she was a bad girl and in those days the troublesome children were sold by their parents into slavery; I could tell she was the descendant of that type of slave.

There were three ways to be sold into slavery. If you were a very bad boy or girl and very troublesome to your parents they would sell you. When the slave catchers were ,; coming by they would call their son to come, and when he would come they would let the slave catchers take him away. The other way was in war. When you won a war you would sell the captives from the people you defeated. The other way was if you were alone; if the slave catchers saw you were a strong man or beautiful woman, they would capture you and take you away.

So make sure you tell the story right. There were three ways: parents sold their children for money not knowing what would happen to them, strong men captured in war were sold - so if we were a village and we thought we could defeat your village we would do it and then we would make money - and if you were alone someone who sees you might grab you and take you away. The Europeans weren't the ones that were going in and taking away people. The African was selling the African to the European.

So, like I told you, she, oh she was a bad girl. I could tell she was from the bad children who were sold by their parents into slavery. (Sammy Adovor)

After touring Cape Coast and Elmina and after listening to speeches during a memorial service for Kwame Ture, I did not know where my anger was to be directed. I questioned everything I had been led to believe and everyone who I thought was a victim. "Where was the face of the great madness that it might be placated, reasoned with or confronted? It was nowhere and it was everywhere"(Courlander, p.204). The history of who African people were was not given to me in the United States and the history of what the African participated in was not willfully told to me here. I thought the European was responsible for my existence in America but "there was now a common madness that spread across oceans, and there was no use invoking it for mercy, for it was a force without a central personality" (Courlander, p.204).

You see there are three characters in this episode we are discussing; three different groups of people. The European sees it only as a trading post. He wants us to move past this and go on to the next phase of development. The African is the middleman who doesn't want you to know he was the middleman. He doesn't want you to come in and tell the truth because he might get himself involved, you see. And then you have the African who was sold into slavery himself. He sees it quite differently. He sees the slave fort as a shattering experience. The other Africans can walk up and down, and see it as a castle. The European comes and says "Is that what my grandfather did. Well it wasn't me. I didn't do anything. It's too bad isn't it. First they burned the Jews...well this is just another one of those things. Let's forget this and move on and build democracy. Three different characters. The African that was a slave sees it quite differently. (Dr. Robert Lee)

In Dahomey a slave was taken as an act of vengeance, a consequence of anger or policy, or the need or whim of a king Vengeance, anger, policy, all these reactions still acknowledge the slaves as men and women. (Courlander, 1967, p. 94)

Was the African to blame for selling me or the European for inspiring the idea and designing my condition? Who was really profit-minded: the African who sold his child

into an uncertain future or the European who killed millions of Africans by reducing the cost of his survival to that of the same or less than livestock with the prospect of making more earnings than those spent? Both were at fault and by claiming the identity of African American I have accepted both the African and White American who were responsible for the sell, degradation, rape and murder of me.

Going Back - Moving Forward

When Black Americans decide to live in Africa are they fleeing their brothers and sisters who will continue to live in "White America...a hostile environment, a setting whose salient attribute is its exploitation of their vulnerability and their powerlessness" (Goldstein, p. 154) or returning to move Ghana beyond its past towards an improved future?

The first mention of sending slaves back to Africa was in 1714 and continued until Senator Bilbo of Mississippi asked Congress to pass his bill providing for the deportation of Negroes to Africa in 1939. In 1817 the American Colonization Society wanted to send them back to satisfy the troubled consciences of New Englanders and to get rid of the free blacks who may affect the enslaved mass in the South. The reason being to enhance the value and security of slave property by removing the free blacks and to seek relief from a bad population without the trouble and expense of improving it (Isaacs, p. 114-115).

According to John Ray, the African American that comes here cannot expect to find a job. By Phil Moore's assessment the Black Americans who come are usually well educated and have a business plan upon arriving. Therefore, are the "free blacks" returning "enhancing the value and security of slave property" by leaving their own communities and helping to keep it as a permanent underclass, subject to exploitation by White America's capitalist system of government or would the Black Americans who have come and opened businesses in Ghana have had the same business opportunities in America that were open to them here? Who or what are we fighting against that we think is causing our oppression in America and impeding our progression in Africa? Is it the White man, his system of government, or our own mindset?

The days of us all coming back to Africa are finished. So if anybody is still thinking that forget it. What we need to do is improve our Harlems. I call all inner cities

populated by Blacks, Harlems. The leadership in America needs to focus on our communities there. Our Harlems are a great asset.

However, it seems the main purpose of the Black man is just to be free; freedom only means acquiring material wealth; moving into a white area where we are the only Black and driving a big motorcar. That is our problem. We don't see ourselves building our own Harlems. We need to control our own economic situation and be loyal to our own kind. Don 't be ashamed to be an African and don 't let anyone come and tell you, 'You 're not an African you 're an American. ' Don 't you believe that lie because he doesn't think that. He thinks America is the White mans country and you were brought there as slaves to help it. That's what he teaches his children.

So don 't go for being the only Black in a White community and don 't be ashamed to go to a Black university either. We need to organize. The Europeans are very organized and seemed to have figured out how to manipulate the world to their benefit. We need to learn how to organize, invest and support our own as well. The Europeans do it. We need to as well and not be ashamed of it. (Dr. Robert Lee)

Speaking about the Black man's country and not his community in America, even though her comment can be applied to both, Mary Ellen Ray adds,

The world doesn't owe any of us anything and there is no reason this country can 't grow except because of the people 's attitudes. We need to bring in African Americans to help foster positive business initiatives because it seems that the Africans don't want to help themselves.

That is such a European mentality. (Ann Pobi)

The question is how do you change the country? (Mary Ray)

You don't. (John Ray)Then how do you make them move forward? (Mary Ray)

They will. (John Ray)

But how? (Mary Ellen)

They will. On their own terms and at their own pace they will eventually get where they need to or rather want to be. (John Ray)

Rabbi Kohain Halevi made the following statement about White people but it can also be applied to any person, Black or White who has the Eurocentric idea of coming into a foreign land and changing it with respect to their own ideas of improvement or development.

What can White people do to help us? Leave us alone. You meddle in our affairs. Whenever White people were supposed to be doing good for us we ended up exploited. So I don't trust White people or their intentions and I make no apologies for that.

In the past our future was predetermined. There are still impediments to our success but as Blacks we need to attempt to improve our condition collectively rather than independently. However, because our actions and behavior are produced by history 'as long as our cultural identity is in question or open to self-doubt, there can be no positive identification within the demands of our political and economic existence' (Goldstein, p.367). We must understand our past to move towards a productive future.

Conclusion

The video documentary has no specific focus but is organized as a flow from topic to topic based on the previous soundbite from each informant. It moves from the reasons for deciding to live in Ghana, what was expected upon arrival, first impressions, views on Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana now, the slave dungeons, and the impact of the slave trade.

The video documentary builds from one person to the next and this paper follows almost the same format. I organized both with the idea of a discussion-taking place although each interview was conducted separately.

The paper as well as the documentary have no ultimate conclusion but are open ended, leaving questions unanswered to provoke further thought.

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Informants

Rabbi Kohain Nathanya Halevi, Cape Coast.

Dr. Robbert E. Lee, Laboni, Accra.

John and Mary Ellen Ray, Osu, Accra.

Sammy Adovor, East Legon, Accra.