200th Anniversary of the Slave Trade Act of 1808

Africans and the African Diaspora

January 10, 2008

The Slave Trade Act of 1808, passed by Congress in March of 1807, became effective January 1, 1808. On January 10, 2008 the Center for the National Archives Experience held a day-long symposium to commemorate its 200th anniversary and raise awareness of the slave trade, its abolition, and its impact on United States history and culture.

This panel identifies and compares the status of African descendant communities in the United States and other American regions during the periods of enslavement and abolition. Moderated by Sheila Walker, executive director, Afriodiaspora, Inc.; panelists include **Gwendolyn Midlo Hall**, senior research fellow, Tulane University; **Selwyn H. H. Carrington**, professor of history, Howard University; **Michael Gomez**, professor of history, New York University; **Michael Turner**, professor of history, Hunter College, City University of New York; and historian and scholar **Bernice Reagon**

JOE HARRIS: We're going to begin our afternoon session with panel number two, Africans and the African Diaspora. Our moderator for this is Professor Shelia Walker. She will take over from here, tell you a little bit about her interests, the focus of the panel and we will proceed from there. We have made the point and she has agreed there will be a Q&A.

SHEILA WALKER: I wasn't on before, now I'm on. When Joseph Harris asked me to be part of this I thought I'm not an historian, what can I say about evolution.

[laughter]

About abolition, excuse me! I don't know how that happened. So I was a little relieved to see that this panel was on the African Diaspora and I think that it's important to see this as the beginning of a process of correcting the fact that our level of ignorance about the impact of the global trade in enslaved Africans, without understanding that not only do we not understand the Americas, but we don't understand the world. I'm an official disciple of Joseph Harris, I had a conversion experience when I attended his 1979 conference on Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora, prior to that I was only thinking Americas but

then I began to think more globally and I now have the serious problem that Joe made these wonderful maps of the African Diaspora and I think I have to go to all those places and now I want to make films all about those places because I'm bothered that we don't know where we are and what we're doing and what kinds of cultural impacts that African descendents have had every place where we are. In following Joe's footsteps, this is tiring and costs me money, but anyway, I went to India because Joe wrote this book on the African presence in Asia and I went to India to a conference on the Siddis, Afro-Indians who described themselves as having kingly hair, and when I heard that word it sounded very familiar and I wondered where it was from and I was told that it was a Baloch word from Pakistan, that made no sense. It's actually a Kecongo word and probably exists in other Bartu languages and it refers to, you know kingly hair. So if that's in India what else do we have to find of the cultural ramifications of the African presence in India? These Afro-Indians in Guturot also play an instrument that they recognize as being of African origin, they call it the maloonga. I don't know where in Bartu speaking Africa that word is from, but in Brazil it's called the beating bowl. A Kapaui master was at my house, I showed him images and he said, "Oh yeah, I know that, yeah, they play just like us." But he didn't understand the significance of the fact that these are people in Guturot and he's in Brazil and they're both playing exactly the same instrument. So I think it's really important for us to situate us in the United States, not as a totally separate planet, but as part of this global African Diaspora. I'm very excited about this panel because when I was studying cultural anthropology I learned that we African-American in the United States contrary to those people to the south in Brazil and Haiti and other places in the Caribbean, we had no African culture.

Why? Because the Africans brought to the United States were all separated so that they couldn't conspire because they wouldn't speak the same languages, so we didn't have identifiable groups and identifiable African culture in the United States. What's really exciting is that now we know that we can know so much more than we thought we could when I was in graduate school for example and it's exciting to be on a panel with people who have been vehicles of our knowing more. Vehicles of substituting facts for myths. So, and we also, based on this more accurate knowledge have a real responsibility to share it, to make it much more public, to take it into popular culture, to try to get it into the schools so we

can cease being quite so mis-educated, to use a word that Carter G. Woodson used in the 1930s and it is still true. This is disturbing. So this morning it was stated that this is – to talk about abolition - the abolition act was just the beginning of a process right? I mean when the British said in 1807 we are declaring abolition, that only meant the Atlantic world, it didn't mean in the Indian Ocean world and it had nothing to do with the ending - I mean it had something to do – but slavery went on for how many decades thereafter? Officially in Brazil

until 1888. That's quite a few decades. So ideally this act today is part of the process of beginning to tell the story and to tell the story accurately and ideally it shouldn't take so many decades for us to have a better sense of the truth.

So the rules for this afternoon is yes we will have a Q&A. The speakers should not break out, we should stay seated. Everybody will be requested to say their brilliant remarks in five minutes about the global African Diaspora, that shouldn't be too hard. I'm wired, okay, so I'm going to be getting these signals and so I will say. Five, seven, so five minutes that really means eight so that we can have time for discussion among members of the committee and then the Q&A and you will have to go to the mics that are at the beginning of the stairwells on both sides because it's all being taped. Okay.

So without further adieu I will say something about each person, I'm not going to read what's written because you can do that. I will say what I find kind of interesting about each person. I talked about the fact that we were told that African identities hadn't remained in the United States. And that's not true, and so on the panel we have, I think the people who have given us the best sense of the continuity of African, specific African ethnicities in the United States beginning with Gwendolyn Midlo Hall who's told us about the Saniganbian presence in colonial Louisiana. She also has the interesting characteristic of being it says Chevalia, I hope it's Chevaliar, [French speaking] By the government of France. This is not usual for US academics, so I think this is pretty nice.

[applause]

And my other favorite publication of hers is Africans in the Americas continuities of ethnicities and regions. I think this is really important because no Africans came to the United States, or any place in the Americas. People came with very specific African identities, they remained, they have left very specific traces and I think this is really important. When I spoke with Selwyn H.H., I'm convinced that that means his highness. Carrington. When I spoke with him yesterday I said, "Well what should I say about you?" And he said, "Oh don't give me that doctor stuff, just say I'm an African from Tobago, you know Trinidad and Tobago, Tobago which is where African culture is even more alive and well than in Trinidad, however on the academic side he does have a significant book called

the sugar industry and the abolition of the slave trade. As a non historian I didn't understand that in the 18th century sugar was like oil for us. So for us non historians I think that he may have something very enlightening for us to know. Michael Gomez, Michael Gomez is the other person who for me gave me a sense of the continuing specific African presences in the Americas with his book exchanging our country marks that givesus a sense of where Mondae speaking

people were and what they did. Where Senegambians were and what they did in the context of the United States. So this is new knowledge for us. He also founded and has been leading the association for the worldwide study of the African Diaspora which has been, well which is an academic organization that is trying to put Osiris back together.(inaudible) from (inaudible) said Africa is like Ocyrus, it's been cut into pieces and scattered over the earth, it's our responsibility to put it back together. And OSWAT is one of the organizations that's trying to put the pieces back together. Michael Turner, now we've known each other forever and Michael is one of the more Diasporic African Diasporans. He's also broken intellectual ground one by talking about the returned Africans, we think about Liberia and perhaps Sierra Leone, we don't tend to think about Benin and the return Brazilians who have remained a significant factor in that whole - between Nigeria all the way to Ghana, including the first president of Togo, Olympio - what his ancestors had returned from Brazil.

Doctor Bernice Johnson Reagon, we know her most probably more as someone who's taken African-American culture and put African-American culture out there on the waves singing with sweet honey and the rock. However I asked everyone for some significant fact and she's the only person who gave me her significant fact and I will share it with you. Which is, between 1974 and '76 she was a staff scholar of the African Diaspora program of the Smithsonian bicentennial festival and what's significant about this was that it was the -I will read what she said - the first program sponsored by an establishment institution that used the term and concept of African Diaspora to look at African-American culture as part of a world family of culture based in Africa and then she went on to share it by singing about it. So without further adieu. Dr. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall.

GWENDOLYN MIDLO HALL: Okay, this is working right? Okay. First of all I want to make a correction, my book changed its title from what you read to what is actually published so don't think I have a book I'm promising out there that's not there, it really did come out. It's called Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas, restoring the links. Okay? Okay. All right.

Now second thing is I don'tknow if you all know this, but I'm a native of New Orleans which makes me culturally very African in my opinion. I was born there, I left when I was 20, I came back as soon as I could, I moved back 40 years later. And I planned to stay there the rest of my life and I was really ensconced and

along came Katrina and I wasn't there during Katrina but I had a post Katrina accident and during 2006 I was really sick, one day I was in the hospital with general asepsis looking at the Superdome, and so that was a great occasion, I was really sick for about a year, I couldn't lecture and I must tell you I do love lecturing. And so this is the second time I've had a chance to talk to a group

since I got hurt. And so I'm very happy to be back in the world a bit. But let me tell you the positive side, I did have to give up on living in New Orleans because I can't live alone and I need help. So I'm living in Mexico and not New Mexico, old Mexico. And let me tell you that my editor has told me one book at a time please. So he's looking at my memoirs and then after that he can look at the next book that's almost finished and aside from that I've got a project to extend my slave database hemisphere wide. So state by state, completed by state, not that I'm going to do it, but the design is there and what I want to do is encourage people who live in their various places throughout the Americas to do the project with some technical support. You know nowadays we can do that kind of stuff and so that I think we're going to be learning a whole lot more about African ethnicity throughout the western hemisphere. Okay well Michael Gomez has done a great job about the United States. I looked over some of my stuff too about that and you know the real difference in interpretation between the past and now is that we used to have generic Africans, you know we'd just say Africans and that was the end of it, and then you know over these years we've learned that it's much more than that, we can be much more specific.

There are wonderful documents out there that describe, give us the tale descriptions of every slave, you know and then a lot of ways there's more descriptions of slaves in documents than of free people because slaves were property. So people want to be sure that they own this property and they're describing their property and these documents are all over the Americas, a lot of them give ethnicity descriptions and of course we have to know what these ethnicity descriptions mean because there are changes depending on time and place and what language they're written in and you know changes in Africa and so it's very complicated but it's quite fascinating and I'm basically a historian. I love the concrete. And one thing that you know when I first started studying slavery there was this book out, I forget these people's names, you have to excuse me, but very popular book saying all research and original documents about slavery has been done, we don't need to do this anymore. And of course there's a huge collection of documents and I don't like to call my colleagues lazy, but there's a lot of documents out there that they don't consult and they don't look at and they deny that they exist and I guess a lot of them think that they don't exist, but they do, believe me there are documents out there that's going to tell you very specifically about people, real live people. I mean you know people who used to be alive, now they're alive in cyberspace.

So there they are. For the United States I'm sure that Michael Gomez is going to talk about that. Just one point that I wanted to make here before I stop is that there's an illegal slave trade, of course everyone has pointed out that the slave trade did not end with the law outlawing the slave trade, there was an enormous

slave trade inthe United States in the Gulf south, particularly there is a good book coming out about that now, but thistrade was to a great extent, it was conducted by pirates who were intercepting ships going to Cuba and as a result the ethnicities from the illegal period tended to be heavily Ebo and Euruba. And this, you know this is the only period in US history except for Louisiana where the Euruba were really important, you know and a lot of this was mythological because the people used to say, "Oh, Africans, Eurubas" but for the US there were very, very few Euruba slaves. Louisiana had about 4% among identified ethnicities in the colonial period who were actually Euruba, they calledthem Nago, but the later period I think we will find that they are significantly Euruba and Ebo. Okay and I will relieve you of burdening you any further with this.

WALKER: Amazing, that was five minutes!

HALL: It was?

WALKER: Five minutes, I just got it from the voice of the Goddess.

SELWIN H.H. CARRINGTON: I'm Selwin HH and actually I won't tell you what my HH is for, you know it is not his royal highness, thank you. Unlike you Americans I grew up in colonial societies in the colonial society and of course I was unfortunately or fortunately taught to sing the praises of the British humanitarians for ending the trade in captive Africans. I don't like the word, talk about African slaves and I don't think that Africans were slaves, I think they were enslaved when they came to the Americas. And of course according to Doctor Hall we have a lot of documents, I have in my collection about 600 pages of statistics on importation, that is why I find Kirtin and Eltis and Kline, Richardson, Dreamers, you know when they interpret African history. In fact Eltis didn't like me very much for telling him that he is an Englishman who was very disappointed when Britain ended the slave trade and he thought I was being unfair. As a historian I found out however that there are many, many more reasons and that the story is far more complex than we have come to realize. However as the 200anniversary of the ending of this trade approached I really thought that my department of history would do it, but I was disappointed. I also wrongly believed that the decision to abolition was made as the picture, which my daughter took me to see, Amazing Grace, tended to make you believe that there's all this morality and love for Africans. And I sat through this movie wondering what I was looking at because this was not the slave trade or this was not the trade that I knew, or that I came to recognize in the documents in which I

was reading. And so that this humanitarian impulse which has been given as the major reason, the moral force, fortitude of the British was explained in Amazing Grace, or tried to show you in Amazing Grace and as far as the Americans are

concerned, we know that before the constitution was written, during the colonial period, the south and the north came to disagreement as to the continuation of the trade and so the Americans were forced to put into the constitution the statement that they would end the trade at the end of the 20th year and this is what Jefferson did. Not because he loved enslaved people, but because he was forced to do it by the Constitution of the United States.

Anyhow there are two major interpretations for the ending of the trade both by "Oxonians", people from Oxford. One was by Reginald Copeland and the other by his student Eric Williams. Today we heard from the lecturer that Eric Williams wrote Capitalism and Slavery and I just want to remind historians that his daughter is still alive and if you wish to have a daughter who keeps you alive you would have somebody like Erica who is the daughter of Eric Williams because she wrote to the organizers of this conference to find out what they were doing to make sure that her father's position on the slave trade was carefully outlined. Eric Williams did argue the economic relevance of ending the trade and because I taught Caribbean economic history at the University of the West Indies. I spent oh, about ten years in the archives in England trying to find out what happened to the West Indies. Those are the islands that Christopher Columbus saw as beautiful and so forth, all of a sudden became mill stones?

So what happened? And I found out that it was because of sugar and I found out that the British were about to change the economic system and therefore they could expand or expend slavery. As a matter of fact in 1774 the Duke of New Castle told the Jamaicans that they could not pass legislation which interfered with the trade of Britain and they wanted to end the slave trade as far as people who not as old as 35 years were concerned. And he said, "You can't do that" so why did the British in a couple of years all of a sudden come to realize that this trade must go? And certainly it was because they were changing into a different economy and of course sugar was being produced by everybody. You've got sugar in Cuba, in Bahia, in Brazil, you've got sugar all over the place. The West Indies were too costly and in fact it was not the West Indies, it was not their fault, sugar was being carried to England by British ships, the agents were Britishers, the factors were Britishers, the insurances were Britishers, and every percentage added up, so by the time the sugar got to England it was too expensive. And so they talk about over production as you heard today, but over production was only part of the argument. Sugar was no longer important. All right, as far as Americans are concerned, I think it is necessary, so I had the indication, it is impossible to read from this thing. I think that it is important to understand American history from the enslaved position because you come to identify with the relationship between the Indians and the Africans you come to understand the Seminoles, you come to understand the American army why they gave them, why they sent them to Oklahoma in terms of the treaty negotiated

with the US army and you come to realize that in the west enslaved Africans played a very important part to the extent that they were called buffalo food by Indians and so forth. All of this we need to know and to not to teach African history or the Diaspora in schools is a great mistake. We deny our history. Thank you.

WALKER: This is a wonderful panel. That was eight, excellent Michael.

MICHAEL GOMEZ: Well I'd like to thankProfessor Harris for inviting me to participate in this forum. Can you hear me okay? And but I find myself shackled to this chair. My time of expression cut in half. So apparently we are trying to mimic conditions of enslavement as we go forward. Let me see if I can condense what I wanted to say into what I need to say and that is I would like to leave with you the argument that it is important that we in discussing slavery, post emancipation, etceteras, and in so far as it concerns the contributions of Africans that we look at the African as a multi-dimensional human being. And that we not confine ourselves to the labor of Africans in what becomes the new world and to be sure the contributions of Africans to the labor force in creating what becomes the Americas was enormous, we understand that. So what I'm trying to suggest here is that we also need to talk about Africans in their full dimension. Okay, that is to say that Africans didn't just simply bring their muscles and sweat to the Americas, they also brought their culture, they brought ideas, that is to say they had certain perspectives about the universe, about the world. They had certain beliefs, okay, which were imported into the Americas with them. They had certain ideas about familial structures, and how they had their own ideas about how, you know what parental authority meant and how children were to be raised. They had their own preferences for what we now call the culinary arts and cuisine. They had their own sartorial style and it's very clear that when you look at the records, whatever leftovers were given to them, often times they were able to refashion, okay, into splendid statements and adornments of the self. They brought their own notions of beauty and you can see various stylistic expressions okay in the literature and what we know about these Africans. As well they contributed to the technology that would propel the Americas with respect to agricultural schemes, with respect to navigation. They had their own sense of spatiality. And so they contributed as merchants, brought their own sense of marketing into the Americas and as well maintained long distance commercial endeavors. They were not confined to rural areas, they were involved in urban life in every aspect of urban life so we need to realize and think about Africans in their totality, that they were full human beings, okay, in bondage but still full human beings.

Now why do I say that? Because we're at a moment in the scholarship in which there is an ongoing debate about the nature of the African contribution and there

are those within the field of history who continued to write as if the African, shall we say background antecedent is unimportant, that's what's really important here is what takes place in the new world. And that is because some of these scholars are very, very established. They made their marks decades ago and consequently - let's rephrase that, they are resistant to new ways of looking at these problems and in addition you have those who not without formal training in anything having to do with African studies either have no interest in pursuing those studies or don't find them to be very relevant to the study of the Americas. Often individuals are in both camps, okay so you have that. And then you also have, you know developments in cultural studies, post colonial studies, which you know foreground and emphasize, you know the fluid and varying notions of statuses, of categories. The nature of the relationship between these categories. They emphasize the markets and the expansive nature of the markets, the acceleration of travel and interchange and involvements between human beings and consequently the notion coming out of those studies is that there's nothing fixed about the human condition, okay. And I think that what we need to do is to bring to (inaudible) bearing perspectives, okay. There is some tension between those who propose that there is very little purpose in looking at notions of you know atavistic contexts and there is no such thing as a pure human condition, everything is subject to change and varying and contingent. Okay so trying to condense this, and so you want to bring that into a conversation with people like myself and others on the panel who study societies and phenomena which date back several hundred years and while there will be tension between these kinds of analyses, we need not fear the contributions that we all have to make. And in fact you know a person who studies the Africa past well understands that there is tremendous fluidity and change in the African context. So that there's not necessarily a problem, okay in the differing perspectives on the African past, but what is important is that we bring into conversation the continent of Africa with these varying sites in the new world okay to make sense of what becomes experiences in slavery and post emancipation otherwise they don't make much sense. I mean what do you do with a Denmark Vizi, I mean who was a Denmark Vizi, who was a Mary Prince, who was a (inaudible), I mean how do we understand these people, people who live in multiple sites, who move from place to place to place. You know from what extent were they African, to what extent were they new world. And then what we have to understand is that with okay the development of slavery and post emancipation, we see a development of a tremendous conversation about Africa, okay in the lives of Africans and the African derived. I mean it's either implicit or explicit. And there are those who try to run away from Africa and there are those who gravitate toward it.

My contention is that we can not understand Africans, people of African descent in what becomes the United States, Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, wherever, we can't really understand them within the parochial confine of the nation state. It's just

makes no sense. It's completely impossible. We have to broaden the framework. Now this doesn't necessarily work for everything, all phenomena, I mean there is a thing called the United States. There is an entity called Brazil and I'm wrapping it up. These things do exist. But in order to understand, let's just take for example very quickly the phenomenon of Barack Obama, okay. It's right there. You can not understand African-American history, US history, it is completely incomprehensible if you confine yourself to the nation state because there have been too many contributions from people out side of the United States to the United States, and to the life of African-Americans whose actual position relative to those born in this country is a matter of some question. So I would urge you to broaden your perspective and your framework in your study of people of African descent.

WALKER: That's in spite of the time constraint. Not bad.

MICHAEL TURNER: Okay, broadening one's perspective let's go back to Brazil for a second, think that's about all I'll have time to talk about. We visited Brazil earlier this morning. Let's go back for a second to look at a country where the influence of Africa again was so profound and remains so profound. Looking at the influence of Africa in Brazil and outside of Brazil in the global African Diaspora historically as well as in a contemporary age, it leads to subjects like trafficking of Brazilians who are trafficked, young women for the most part who are trafficked to Europe, were trafficked to the United States, in terms of contemporary enslavement. Historically if we look at the influences of Afro-Brazilians and we sort of look at Brazil and the African continent, starting at about 1835 with the Islamic rebellion in Bahia, Brazil, some of the consequences of that Islamic rebellion which was Islamic but also not Islamic were that there were people who were either enslaved or freed, Libertos as they were called, who felt that Bahia was not a good place to remain. Three libertos on a street in Baia in 1838 or 1839 was two too many and so they decided let's leave Baia, things are not good for us in Baia, let's go back to Africa. Some of us had been born in Africa, some not, so between 1839 and 1900 eight thousands Afro-Brazilians leave Brazil, return to Africa, go to places like Banin, Togo, one of my favorite places because in Togo and also in Ghana the people in Ghana are called the Tabon people and when I was doing research in 1975 and (inaudible) said Tabon people, what does that mean? And they said well they didn't speak any Ghanaian languages when they came back and so we would go and talk to them and say how are you and they would say Tabon, okay, in Portuguese and so they are know as the Tabon people. And the Ghanaian, the young Ghanaian out in Chicago is actually doing his PhD on the Tabon people which I think is kind of wonderful. But again they were in a sense revising rethinking what it meant to be a returnee, and I as an innocent from Harlem doing research in Paris back in 1970, I'm sitting in the Bibliotech National and I'm reading something and it says,

oh, these returnees got involved in the slave trade! I went what! It took me a few days to get over it, but you know I had to realize well 1840, 1845, on the West African coast, what's the going operation? You get involved in the slave trade, you had been a slave, but you sort of forget about that, good capitalist that you were going to become. So you had, you know images of people who had been enslaved having enslaved people themselves. That was sort of difficult to deal with but I did. They rehabilitate themselves under European colonialism, they become anti-French, anti-German, anti-British, depending on the colonial context, they become newspaper editors and publishers, again sort of criticizing the French, criticizing the British, criticizing the Germans and were very valiant in the case of one in Benin actually was killed by the French governor at the time and when I sort of track that down many years later and talk to the guy's nephew I said, "Would you explain to me why the news that your great uncle was killed was on page four of his newspaper? I don't understand that." And he sort of said, blah, blah, blah.

And so two months later when I found out that the French governor at the time, Governor Forn, for those who know French history, had him killed for being a critic of the French government, this was a hero. Last year I went to Benin for the US government on experience to talk about democratization and met the great grand daughter of Governor Forn. He had a lot of children of mixed race and so this very imperious woman in her mansion in Kotinu sort of tells me to come in and when she tells me she was the grand daughter of Forn I said, "Oh but he killed my Brazilian." And she looked at me like, get over it! But again I mean history does not go away. It is there to bite you in parts of your anatomy that you don't want to think about. So that again villains, heroes, all of the above in terms of the Afro-Brazilians and their descendents, positive point, other Afro-Brazilians in Benin participate in the return to democracy movement in 1989, 1990 they defy the dictator in Kotinu very valiantly. The archbishop at the time, Disoza, the Dalmeda sisters, again for democracy in Benin and rehabilitate themselves as being true democrats. So heroes, villains, it's all sort of you know part of the same story, a very valiant story and I'm proud to do research on them and will continue to do research on the Afro-Brazilians. Thanks a lot.

WALKER: Under eight minutes. Bernice.

BERNICE REAGON: I'm very happy to be here. In October I was invited to the University of Vermont to do a presentation on the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade. The young African-American staff member of public programs had an Aunt who was Jamaican American who had brought her from the age of five or six to sweet honey children's concerts in New York and told her in her job she had to have a program on the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade. So I did my presentation and I started with where the bill was introduced by Bradley from

Vermont in 1805 and it was passed in 1807 and signed by Thomas Jefferson to be active in 1808 and then went on with my presentation and when she drove me to the airport she said, "I didn't know it happened in the United States too." Her orientation had come from her aunt, from Jamaica and she thought she was actually celebrating as well as she could, this event in the Caribbean.

So this kind of struggle to have these events are absolutely crucial because you actually don't know unless you're in an environment where it is shared and if you think you know you don't really know if you know unless you try telling somebody else.

What you done in here
You ain't got your garments on
What you doing in here
You ain't got your garments on
What you doing in here
You ain't got your garments on
Well God got his eyes on you.

Now you can take that and say that it's a church song and you can take that and do all sorts of things with it, but if at some point when you halfway understood what I said, you wondered if I was talking to you about whether you belong in this place, then that's the African function of that song. So if it was a church song, it was a church song and it raises the question of why you walked in the room when you're not supposed to be here if that in fact is what it does.

You can't pray in here
You ain't got your garments on
You can't pray in here
You ain't got your garments on
You can't pray in here
You ain't got your garments on
Well God got his eyes on you

When Tiff came to the south to do voter registration during the civil rights Movement they came to what was called black belt areas. Those places became black belt areas in direct connection with the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade. If you read about it you will notice South Carolina and Georgia kept up their stuff that they always did all the way back to finding the country. Virginia voted in the other direction. Virginia was for this bill because they already were growing slaves as a crop, so the domestic slave trade expanded greatly peoplely.

The areas that were still black belt areas outnumbering whites, three to one, very

dangerous places if these people came onboard as full fledged citizens accessible to the processes in the communities in which they lived. I was born in Southwest Georgia and in the 1820s Nelson Tiff came to Southwest Georgia, the whites in the area on the Flint River were Quakers from New York. They had gotten the land from the creeks, they named it Albany because the Flint River reminded them of the Hudson in New York. They got into some tensions with the creek Indians and when Tiff who was from Connecticut came they sold land to him on the banks of the Flint River. Tiff was not operating as a one, he represented a group of investors and his job was to go to Southwest Georgia and open up that territory for large scale agricultural cotton and corn plantations which he did and then that area was in fact flooded with black people coming primarily from northern slave states and this particular grouping in Southwest Georgia is what shaped who I am.

And so under any number of ways I can testify as African. So people who are suggesting somebody's African and somebody's not African and that you can put it this way or that way, it really depends, it really depends on who you are and how you operate in the universe whether you're coming out of an African cultural base or whether for a structure like the Smithsonian you have to half way operate as if you are a western trained scholar, although when you go in the elevators in the Smithsonian, because you are African, you hum. [laughter] And everybody looks at you really strange, even the other people who look like you because they're passing, but they know what you're doing. And they want to sing,

You can't stay in here!
You ain't got your garments on
You can't stay in here
You ain't got your garments on

And some people in this room know on a very deep level what I am doing. You can die with that knowledge. You can die with that knowledge and if you do, we won't never know you knew it. And there is no possible chance that your grandchildren will know how to operate in that stance, because it's not the singing of the song. You have to find yourself in a place and somebody walks in and you know they ain't got no business in there. And you have to know how to stand in that knowing and have your actions to come out of that positioning and there are ways, we were actually socialized to do it in Southwest Georgia.

WALKER: I'm sure our time keeper will find us absolutely extraordinary and there was so much content. I got a few themes out of this I just want to refer to because now we have the right to 15 minutes or so of the discussion of the panel, among member of the pane, and then another, do we have another half

hour is that right? For a broader discussion. Geography. The issue of the nation state is constraint. I think it has become pretty clear in everything that has been said that the colonial geographies that have defined nation states are really not applicable to what we're talking about. We're talking about a whole different sense of geography and I mean the idea of looking at people as Michael Gomez said, enslaved Africans, thank you HH, enslaved Africans as multi-dimensional people also people with these multi identities. We have the contradictions and the multiplicity of the roles of these return Brazilians. We have these multiplicities of identity, you know passing versus being all of who you are when Michael Gomez was talking about the aesthetics. Now all over the enslaved world of African descendents there were sanctuary laws, now this is during slavery and the sanctuary laws said these African descendents, the enslaved people don't have the right to wear satin, they don't have the right to wear, so that means obviously these enslaved people were not all just looking like they were enslaved, they were also showing that they had a sense of style, a sense of aesthetics, a sense of control over who they were. The technologies, you know we are, among the lies that we've been told, one of them, a really significant one is that enslaved Africans didn't bring anything but their labor force, as opposed to if you read the documents understanding that there was a very specific selection of Africans with certain skills needed to develop the Americas.

Mining, you know the Portuguese were amazed that - there's a great sentence that the presence of Africans in the gold mines in (inaudible) the second rich town in the Americas - the presence of Africans brought luck for finding gold. Luck? Or knowledge? Where were these people specifically recruited from? Well the British gold coast. So they were recruited because of their technological knowledge that the Europeans didn't have, so part of what this issue is redefining, what the whole slave trade was about and redefining therefore who African descendents are in the larger context of the African Diaspora. When Gwendolyn Midlo Hall was talking about the ethnicities and the names, I was just in Northern Ecuador where there are people with all these African names. They don't know it but there are people named Matamba, there are people named Katabali, there are people named Ioiri, in Chalta, in Ecuador, we don't think about Ecuador too much. In Chalta there are lots of people whose name is Congo, that's my great grandmother's name so what could I say, "Hola primo!" Among the documents that are available, they're not all written documents. We have songs as documents, song lyrics, song styles, musical styles, names of instruments. So those are just some of the themes and the significance of not teaching African history, not teaching the continuity as opposed to teaching the continuity from Africa to the Americas and not teaching the continuities the movements of people of African origin and the African Diaspora. The movements provoked by abolition in the United States and elsewhere.