The African Origins of African Americans and the Black Codes:

The Right to Citizenship and Education in the United States

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# Table of Contents

**ITSTC Rationale and Recommendations** ........................................... 6

**The African Origins of African-Americans** ........................................... 8

  - Introduction .................................................................................. 8
  - The Origin of Historical Writings on Slavery in the United States .......... 10
  - The African Past: Memory Loss .................................................. 11
  - African People in the United States: Where did our ancestors come from? 13
  - African Skills Brought to America ........................................... 18
  - African-American Citizenship .................................................. 25

**The Black Codes and their Impact on African-Americans** .................. 29

  - Introduction .................................................................................. 29
  - The Black Codes and the denial of Education to African-Americans .... 31

**Conclusion** ................................................................................... 33

**References** .................................................................................... 37

**About the Author** .......................................................................... 42
In the introduction to the “Recommendations and Rationale for Recommendations section” of the *Illinois Trans Atlantic Slave Trade Commission (ITSTC) Report 1* and the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade System (TASTS), it states:

It is important to reiterate that any examination of TASTS must begin with a construction of foundational assumptions around African peoples’ sense of what it means to be human and their civilizations before TASTS. The proper study of the TASTS and any effort to understand its lingering legacy must be grounded in the paradigm that is characterized by the triangle of Maat, Maafa, and Sankofa. And, further, to truly understand the enslavement system the research process must take one to the locus of history, institutions, mind, and consciousness of the Europeans. (p. 28)

The following article serves as an addition to the research paradigm that looks at the triangle of Maat, Maafa, and Sankofa. In doing so, it attempts to respond to look at people from the various African nations that were transported to the United States and the implications of their disembarkation on these shores. This is important since the State of Illinois was instrumental in the Underground Railroad Network and the first Great Migration of African peoples from the Southern states between 1890 and 1920 and again between 1950 and 1970 to Chicago where they settled in the now gentrified Bronzeville community on the Southside and the Lawndale community on the Westside.

It would further provide access to an area of research that has been sorely neglected by many scholars of African history in the United States. It will become a part of the mental decolonization process that public history; a history that is seen, heard, and interpreted by a popular audiences and then passed on as factual, can be correctly presented without all of the myths and delusions. It will assist in illuminating the reality of the African past in the United States and consequently, in the State of Illinois as well. This would include contributing to the recommendation 2.4 in which an Academy of African American Scholars on the Trans Atlantic
Slave Trade System would host conferences on the TASTS. (p.34)

These finding will be essential to the creation of an African-centered curriculum initiative at the state level, which would be established for K-12 and higher education to include review and instructional development activities that focus on age-appropriate critical understandings of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade System. (p.36)

In that regard this article addresses the recommendation 3.1, which states:

A specific curricula review and instructional development project be undertaken to document and appropriately integrate the role of Illinois legislation, the “Black Codes” and elected officials in the TASTS.

Since the Black Codes by states, counties, and cities reflect a corpus of research documentation of the extent to which the dehumanization, physical, ethno cultural genocide permeated this nation, (p.36); this article assists in providing a foundational resource for further research into the nature of the Black Codes and their impact on the physical, social, economic, and political life of Africans in the United States and the State of Illinois in particular.

Subsequently, this article fulfills the requirements of recommendation 3.2, which states:

A specific curricula review and instructional development project be undertaken to document and appropriately integrate the chronology and role of Illinois in U.S. history in the TASTS, at the local, county, and state levels. (p.36)

Finally, since there has been a, “silence, avoidance, intentional or unintentional misrepresentation of the TASTS in the nation’s schools in general, and Illinois in particular...” (p.37); pursuant to the recommendations of the ITSTC this article will open a doorway into some of the necessary curricular content so badly needed by students in grades K-12. One of the leading curriculum specialists in the United States, William Pinar, maintains that:
The conservatives’ insistence upon the traditional school curriculum, an Eurocentric curriculum, can be understood as not only denial of self to African-Americans but to European-American students as well. White students fail to understand that the American self—in historical and cultural senses—is not exclusively a European-American self, it is inextricably African-American. (1994, p. 245)

THE AFRICAN ORIGINS OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS

INTRODUCTION

One of the real challenging issues for people of African descent in the United States and one that plagued historians for years is the question of where did the Africans brought to the United States come from in Africa? It has been acknowledged that many came from West Africa along the so-called “Slave Coast.” But for most this was nothing more than a holding-station. Many historians and historiographers have even gone so far as to say that they don’t even know where Africans brought to America came from. This, of course, is a false statement. Not only is it known what African nations were brought to the Americas, and particularly the United States; it is known what ships they came on, who owned those ships, who built most of those ships, who insured their cargoes, who captained those ships, how many Africans were initially boarded onto those ships and how many survived the Middle Passage, what European nations brought them here, whom they were sold to once they arrived, and how they lived and worked while they were here.

It is known when and how they resisted enslavement, what punishments they suffered at the hands of so-called masters and overseers, the exploitation they endured mentally, physically, emotionally, and sexually, the alliances they made with Native American nations and the strategies used by European powers to exploit those coalitions, and the tactics used to remove from them any memory of their cultural African past. In fact, without the
removal of their African past, sometimes known as the “tree of forgetfulness,” it would have been impossible for those Africans to have been subjugated such as they were.

One of the most under studied questions has been the origin of those Africans whom were brought to the United States. While significant research has been done on the question of those African nations that were brought to other parts of the Americas, e.g.; the Caribbean, Central and South America; very little has been done in the area of identifying the African nations that were brought to the United States.

Some have argued that the African heritage of those Africans whom were enslaved in the Americas created a loss of identity and all traits of African culture. Others have argued that those African cultural traits were never completely removed through the enslavement process. This culminated in a debate between Edward Franklin Frazier, a Black Sociologist and Melville J. Herskovits, a Jewish Anthropologist (Frazier, 1966; Herskovits, 1958). Later Herskovits (1966) took a more conciliatory view on African cultural retentions. While this debate ended in what amounted to be a stalemate with intellectual camps being established on both sides of the argument, the question still remains; what African nations were brought to the United States specifically? Where did they come from and where did they disembark on the shores of the United States and when did this happen?

In this article, which supports the rationale and recommendations of the ITASTC, we will look at the origins of some of those African nations that were brought to the United States and what their roles were as perceived chattel in the slavocracy that became the United States and the skills they brought with them to create the massive wealth that became the foundation for the Industrial Revolution and subsequent capitalist society. Next, we will look at the notion of citizenship and who was considered a citizen in the United States. In the process we will gain insights into the de-Africanization of the African population settled in the United States and what happened to
create the disconnection between those descendants of the original Africans and the debasement of their descendants. Finally, we will look at the consequences of the Code Noir or Black Codes on the life of Africans in the United States with specific emphasis on the impact of various legislative enactments, which denied educational opportunities to Africans.

**The Origin of Historical Writings on Slavery in the United States**

When Ulrich Bonnell Phillips considered American slavery at the beginning of the twentieth-century, he made a laudable attempt to consider the African background of the servile population. “… only to the unpracticed eye,” he wrote, “could all Africans look alike.” Few, excluding even Phillips, gave the fact much emphasis in terms of its effects on slavery and race relations in the colonial South. This was because Phillips, like many others, tended to view slavery as a monolithic institution (Phillips, 1918/1966).

A white contemporary in the sister state of South Carolina reveal a quality of greater perceptivity and attached meaning to the varied African background of the black population. “The so-called race problem,” Phillips said, “is not one of the relations of a single number of negro races, but rather one of a number of white races with a number of negro races. The negro population of the United States is probably as much mixed as the white population.” (1918/1966, p.1)

Early European settlers in the Carolinas came from Barbados. The difference between “Freehold” or “real” property and “chattel slavery” in Barbados and other parts of the West Indies was that the Freehold (as enslaved Africans were defined in the West Indies), except in cases of the master’s indebtedness, could be transferred as personal chattel. Freehold property entitled its holder only to service not to absolute ownership; the master was entitled to the enslaved service but not to their person, and the enslaved
possessed some of the qualities of the serf. By contrast, chattel slavery (a uniquely North American creation) attached the enslaved to the master as personal property, transferable at will. Not until 1754 did South Carolina legally exchange the former for the latter, though its usage developed earlier. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

Before Frank Tannebaum’s 1947 article, “Slave and Citizen,” the tendency of historians of the slave system had been to emphasize the “uniqueness of the American institution.” The first was Phillips and then came Herskovits. Herskovits used a “hemispheric approach.” (2005, p. 3)

The question is why is there a greater recognition of African ethnic diversity in Brazil than in North America? Part of the problem has to do with the “traditionally narrow focus of American history, which prevented the question from ever being asked and, when the fact was adduced, from being accorded much significance.” There are two aspects to the problem; 1) African diversity in America, and 2) African contributions to American society through technology. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

**THE AFRICAN PAST: MEMORY LOSS**

The colonization of the physical continent of Africa and its people also required a concomitant colonization of information about Africa as well. It is also a way to construct and deconstruct the memory of a peoples past.

Memory exists within a sustained social context and the images individuals acquire are socially constructed. It is those in power that maintain cultural dominance over an individual’s acquired memory, which they shape for public consumption (Winfield, 2007). They shape memory and create an historical distance, or what Nietzsche (1886/1996) called the pathos of distance, that colors our cognitive assumptions. As a system of institutions according to Apple:
They ultimately help produce the type of knowledge, as a kind of cultural capital, that is needed to maintain the dominant economic, political, and cultural arrangements that now exist. (2009, p. xxii)

Information about the African homeland and the cherishing of the memories of the ancestral continent from which the enslaved had been forcibly removed was systematically suppressed. No other institution within Western society, and in this case the United States, has been more indictable in that endeavor than the educational system upon African Americans. Yet there were literate Africans in the United States, even while the Ages of Reason and Progress into which enslavement endured were in full swing, and when Whites were expressing a degree of curiosity about Africa, freed African Americans and some enslaved Blacks whom had acquired some leisure and book learning, found it difficult to disinter mythologies and misconceptions of their African past (Anderson, 1988). This could be found in symbols and structures of American slave songs, stories, medicine, and African traditions that endured after the Civil War. African songs were still being sung by those who could trace their ancestry back to Africa (Midlo-Hall, 2005). According to Shepperson:

Yet, the slave masters had done a reasonably good job in erasing much of the African past. But Black men in America could not be stopped from thinking about Africa. And there was one source from which they could learn something about it: The Bible. In the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, Africa and Black men were usually referred to as ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Ethiopians’, following the Greek usage. But none of them seemed to discredit Africa. Indeed, some of them seemed very much to its credit. Black men in America cherished particularly the reference to Moses’ ‘Ethiopian’ (Kushite) wife in Numbers 21 verse 1, and the promise of Psalms 68, verse 31, that ‘Ethiopia would stretch forth her hands unto God’. As student received a classical education, they were beginning to read the Latin and Greek classics in their original languages where the Ethiopians were spoken of with pride and as leading lights in classical civilization. (1974, p. 282)
And when the more learned of them discovered that the Biblical land of the Blacks was an ancient reference to Kushite civilization, with its capital at Meroe they were spurred on to seek further sources of information about that fabulous country. Shepperson states that:

Two were particularly popular during and after the Civil War, Herodotus’ Histories (1942) and the German historian of the Gottingen school, Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren (1760-1842), on ancient African civilizations written in 1833. Indeed, African-Americans were aware of the non-derogatory implications of Heeren’s pro-Meroitic work in the first half of the 19th century - although, in the second half of the 19th century, it is curious that few White historians who have devoted themselves to presenting the positive, non-Hegelian side of African history seem ever to have heard of this German pioneer of non-prejudiced African history. (1974, p. 283)

It was a necessary exhortation since many literate African Americans were determined to show that Black men, the degraded and despised masses of the 19th century, had at one time led the world in civilization. It also meant that African Americans were taking African history seriously at a time when there were very few who were prepared to do so. In spite of their isolation in American society, their limited education, their lack of funds for research and publication, and against all the discouragement of the white, Hegelian stereotypes of an under-developed and undevelopable Africa and Africans, these early African American scholars persisted in a search for the positive, creative elements in the history of Africa.

African People in the United States: Where did our ancestors come from?

Much of the wealth of the major nations of Europe and America was built on the labor and suffering of many millions of Africans. (2005, p. xiii)
The Atlantic slave trade from sub-Saharan Africa began in 1444, more than half a century before Columbus “discovered” the Americas. These early Portuguese voyages down the Atlantic coast of West Africa were motivated above all by the search for gold. The Atlantic slave trade began almost incidentally when free Africans were attacked, kidnapped, put aboard a Portuguese ship, dragged to Portugal in chains, and sold. Enslaved Africans quickly increased in value, and the market for them grew. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

There was no slave trade in West Africa until the Portuguese showed up in 1444. All of the captured Africans were initially, “free people.” Before the European came to Africa, the overwhelming majority of African nations lived in peace and harmony with themselves and their environments. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

Although the numbers of Africans that were brought to the Western hemisphere has been a hotly contested issue among scholars for many years, we cannot come up with more than a minimum figure. W.E.B. DuBois assumed that 15 million Africans reached American shores and left five corpses behind in Africa or at sea for each African landed alive; and that nearly as many Africans died during the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trade. This trade started centuries before the Atlantic slave trade began, and continued long after it ended, and still exists in Sudan and Mauritania. (2005, p. xiv)

A good historian is a detective who asks important questions, seeks out collections of documents and other evidence, selects what she/he considers important, and subjects it to careful evaluation and interpretation. No matter how sophisticated and abstract the methodology, history is telling a story that is more or less true. Some of these stories conform to short-lived fads. The greatest challenge to historians is to seek out and approximate the truth as closely as possible, avoiding rationalizations and denials, which serve to dress up the behavior of particular nations and cast
them in a benign light...Meeting this challenge requires courage and fair-mindedness and the highest level of competence, skill, and hard work. (2005, p. xv)

Corporatism was foundational law based on inequality before the law in accordance with the amount of white blood one had. Corporatism led to mechanisms of social control where a small minority of elites oppressed a large subaltern population.

Slave manumission protected rulers against their subjects and foreign threats. Purity of blood was very important event though many so-called whites had African blood in them.

Some eminent historians are still excusing and rationalizing slavery and the slave trade in the Americas. One popular argument is that slavery was widespread in Africa before the Atlantic slave trade began and that Africans participated in the trade on an equal basis with Europeans. Many Western historians deny that European and American wealth and power was built up to a great extent from the Atlantic slave trade and the unpaid labor of Africans and their descendants in the Americas... (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

This is a part of the false idea that Africans participated in the slave trade on an equal basis with Europeans. Slave trade and slavery existed throughout the world for millennia. But it was not the same in all times and places. Slavery is a historical - not a sociological- category. The transatlantic slave trade was uniquely devastating. It was surely the most vicious, longest-lasting example of human brutality and exploitation in history. It was an intrusive, mobile, maritime activity carried out by faraway powers insulated from retaliation in kind.

Europeans used Africans in their proxy wars to exploit Africa’s resources. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

Africans were needed because the population of Europe was scarce. Irish warriors, English criminals, and religious deserters
were sent to the Americas. These were the dregs of Europe who were released on the “ship of fools” (Foucault, 1988) to rid various European locations of their burdensome populations. French criminals were sent to Louisiana.

There is an equally popular argument that Africans and Europeans shared equal responsibility for the Atlantic slave trade. Unfortunately, some Africans, the vast majority of whom were the victims, not perpetrators are accepting the blame. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

The Atlantic slave trade had a devastating impact on Africa... It created a progressively increasing level of violence and disorganization in African societies. This disorganization and violence may, in fact, lay at the foundation of violence in the Black communities of America today. Europeans disrespected African rulers by referring to them as chiefs instead of Kings. Europeans divided African nations through warfare by the exportation and exploitation of guns to create disputes between one African nation and another.

There is no visible slave trade in Aja/Yoruba lands of the Slave Coast when the Europeans first visited there...The earliest Portuguese slave trade from the Bight of Benin began in the Kingdom of Benin not very far away, but it lasted for only a few decades before the King put a stop to it. During the 18th century, a group of Aja people told an English traveler that the root of their unhappiness was “that they were visited by the Europeans. They say that we Christians introduced the traffick [sic] in slaves and that before our coming they lived in peace.” (2005, p. 15-16)

The development of large African states along the west coast of Africa and along major interior trade routes was often driven by the desire to exert control over the maritime trade and to take advantage of the European demand for slaves. The Kingdom of Segu relied on selling war captives into the Atlantic slave trade and incorporated some of them into its armies. While capturing warriors and selling them was probably not the main motive for the
expansion of Segu, it certainly helped enlarge its military force and finance its wars of expansion.

The Kingdom of Dahomey captured Whydah in 1727 advancing to the Atlantic coast. After Dahomey destroyed the port of Jakin in 1732, Whydah became the exclusive outlet for the maritime trade on the Slave Coast.

The general view of contemporary Europeans was “that Agaja (King of Dahomey) sought control of Ouidah (Whydah) principally in order to secure more effective and unrestricted access to the European trade, remains pervasive.” (2005, p.17)

Two major polities that developed in West African, Asante in the Gold Coast and Dahomey in the Slave Coast, tried to protect their own people from the Atlantic Slave Trade. But this did not mean they opposed enslavement and sale of other peoples, including their close neighbors. There were substantial numbers of Fon and Arada listed in American notarial documents. But this designation might have been broad; Arada was a commonly used ethnic designation in St. Dominique/Haiti.

One Mahi and one Savaru were found in documents in Bahia, Brazil, dating from between 1816 and 1850. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

Imported guns played a major role in African warfare. Tobacco, brandy, and rum caused major addictions among Africans. Rum was especially devastating.

Brazilian merchants replaced the Portuguese in Angola by escalating inter and intra national warfare among African nations. New England rum was used on the Gold coast and Senegambia. Most of these voyages started in Rhode Island with a total of 245. New England rum and gold were the only products that attained the status of currency.

In Sierra Leone during the early 1790s, one observer wrote, “Without rum [exchanged for rice and for slaves], we must already shortly starve.” Europeans started the “drug trade” among
African slavery in the Americas is usually discussed within the context of the need for brute, unskilled labor on sugar, rice, indigo, coffee, and cotton plantations. But Africans were especially needed in the Americas because of their skills. Spain and Portugal began to colonize the Americas well over a century before Britain and France. The Spanish American colonies focused mainly on the mining of silver, gold, and precious stones and the large-scale construction of harbors, docks, warehouses, roads, bridges, houses, churches, cathedrals, and fortresses. Skilled labor was desperately needed, and African skills were known before the conquest and colonization of America began.

Spain outlawed Native American slavery because it was decimating their society, but African slaves remained legal.

**African Skills Brought to America**

The colonization of America depended very heavily on skills brought from Africa. Enslaved Kongo Africans developed and worked in the copper industry at Santiago de Cuba where they remained in high demand for centuries. Africans who were experienced gold miners were in demand very early in Colombia to develop mining there. Africans designated as “mina” were brought to Brazil from the gold-producing regions of West Africa, including Greater Senegambia and the Gold Coast, in order to discover and develop panning and digging for gold. Enslaved Africans were blacksmiths, tanners, shoemakers, and saddle makers. They were designers and builders of warehouses, docks, barracks and homes, public buildings, churches, cathedrals, canals and dams. They were coopers, draymen, and coach drivers, breeders, groomers, and trainers of horses, and cowboys skilled in cattle rearing and herding. They were hunters and fishermen, as well as pearl divers. They were ship builders, navigators, sounders, caulkers, sail makers, weavers, and dyers of cloth, tailors.
and seamstresses. They were indigo-makers, basket weavers, potters, and salt makers. They were cooks, bakers, pastry chefs, candy-makers, street vendors, innkeepers, personal servants, housekeepers, launderers, domestics, doctors, or surgeons, and nurses. They cultivated corn, rice, garden crops, tobacco, poultry, pigs, sheep, and goats. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

The Spanish, English, and French profited from the African slave trade. The European Industrial Revolution would not have been possible without the financial wealth obtained through the African slave trade.

Studies about the African diaspora in the Americas starts with the Brazilian, Nina Rodriguez and the Cuban Fernando Ortiz in the early 20th century. A generation later Herskovits in the U.S. picks up on it. Very few scholars are familiar with many if any African languages.

While “Swahili” became the African language, very few speakers of Ki-Swahili were brought to the Americas. Before the late 18th century, the Yoruba/Nago/Lucumi was not very substantial in the Americas. There were 4% Nago in Louisiana. The presence of Yoruba in the U.S. was insignificant. After 1780 in Haiti and after in the 19th century, Lucumi in Cuba and Nago in Brazil. (2005, p. 22-23)

In the last few decades, anthropologists have denied the influence of African descent in America. The slave trade was a business that involved a great amount of capital. Studies of the diaspora must be concrete and contextualized. Anthropologists tend to project patterns in time and place that they are familiar with mainly European time and place, to all times and places. There were many forms of civilization and the assumption of timelessness is based on methodological flaws of anthropologists when looking at Africa.

Africans in America, based on strong evidence, have always denied their identities. Transatlantic voyage documents must be
supplemented by studies of trans-shipment slave trade. Where Africans came to, is a mirror image of where they came from in Africa. We cannot rely on European definitions of the African coast from which Africans were taken. A lot of the primary research is in other languages. (Midlo-Hall, p. 26, 2005)

African ethnicities were not as fragmented as is widely believed. More Africans were sent to Brazil than any other place. 7000 voyages were to Brazil. While we don’t know the total numbers of direct voyages between Africa and the Americas, many are undercounted.

French documents of the ethnicity of the enslaved Africans are the best preserved next to those of Latin America. French documents confirm African ethnicity in America. English language documents contain the least amount of information of African ethnicity. The best English documents are in the British, West Indies. In Latin America, the conversion of Africans to Catholicism was a top priority. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

Islamized Africans were more likely to resist baptism. In Brazil and Louisiana, women accepted baptism but most men did not. Unfortunately, scholars on Africa based their analysis of African ethnicity on how Europeans in Africa identified an Africans ethnicity.

European assessments of the identity of Africans brought to America are often questionable. Our best information on African identities is how Africans viewed themselves. (Midlo-Hall, 2005)

When Ulrich Bonnell Phillips considered American slavery at the beginning of the 20th century, he made a laudable attempt to consider the African background of the servile population. “Only to the unpracticed eye,” he wrote, “could all Africans look alike.” Few, excluding even Phillips, gave the fact much emphasis in terms of its effects on slavery and race relations in the colonial South. This was because Phillips, like many others, tended to view slavery as a monolithic institution (Phillips, 1918/1966).
A white contemporary in the sister state of South Carolina evinced greater perceptivity and attached meaning to the varied African backgrounds of the black population. “The so-called race problem,” he said, “is not one of the relations of a single number of negro races, but rather one of a number of white races with a number of negro races. The negro population of the United States is probably as much mixed as the white population.” (1981, p.1)

Early European settlers in the Carolinas came from Barbados. The difference between “Freehold” or “real” property and “chattel slavery” in Barbados and other parts of the West Indies was that the Freehold, as slaves were defined in the West Indies, except in cases of the master’s indebtedness, could be transferred as personal chattel. Freehold property entitled its holder only to service not to absolute ownership; the master was entitled to the slaves’ service but not to his person, and the slave possessed some of the qualities of the serf. By contrast, chattel slavery (a uniquely North American creation) attached the slave to the master as personal property, transferable at will. Not until 1754 did South Carolina legally exchange the former for the latter, though its usage developed earlier. (1981, n3, p.2)

Before Frank Tannebaum’s 1947 article, “Slave and Citizen,” the tendency of historians of slavery had been to emphasize the “uniqueness of the American institution.” The first was Phillips, then came Herskovits. Herskovits used a “hemispheric approach.” (2005, p. 3)

The question is this, why is there a greater recognition of African ethnic diversity in Brazil but not in North America? Part of the problem has to do with the “traditionally narrow focus of American history, which prevented the question from ever being asked and, when the fact was adduced, from being accorded much significance.” There are two aspects to the problem: 1) African diversity in America, and 2) African contributions to American society through technology. But white colonists, contrary to the ignorance of their descendants, who blindly assert that all Africans
look alike, would be surprised to know not only that all Africans
do not look alike, but also that early white colonists recognized
those differences (Midlo-Hall, 2005).

These early European colonists paid very close attention to
the distinctions among African peoples in color, size, and cultural
traits. The British colonists were also concerned about where they
got their slaves, what they looked like, and how they performed.
His was especially true among those who would be working in the
areas where rice was cultivated. They sought out Africans from the
Cambia River region. Those from the Gambia region were their
first choice and then those from the Gold Coast (modern Ghana)
were second. Then there were those from the Calabar, or Ibo,
the Niger Delta, the Windward Coast and Angola (Littlefield, p.
9). The colonists preferred those Africans who were tall, healthy
males, young (between eighteen and twenty-five, fourteen to
eighteen for females), and free of blemishes. Heavy emphasis
was placed on the bondsmen being as dark as possible (Littlefield

Mandingos, from the Gambia region, were supposed to be
physically more attractive to Europeans that other Africans. They
were seen as refined and possessing a gentle nature. They were
also viewed by some Europeans as trustworthy. The Koromante,
from the Gold Coast, were said to be especially hardy, ferocious
if angered, unmindful of danger, unwilling to forgive a wrong,
but loyal if their devotion was captured. Papaws and others from
the region around Whydah on the Slave Coast were considered to
be the most valuable. Accustomed to work, more even-tempered
than the Koramantes, they were skilled, complacent, and obedient.
Ibos, from the Niger Delta, were commonly less desirable that
other people imported. They were considered to be melancholy
and suicidal, sickly, unattractive, and superstitious. Peoples
from the region of the Congo and Angola were supposed to be
docile, comely, not especially strong, possessed of a particular
predisposition towards the mechanic arts, but inclined to run away
The so-called Bantu, including some people from the Niger Delta, Congo, and Angola, were chiefly valued for their physical strength and endurance, their capacity for work and their known skill as agricultural laborers. Other nations such as the Fon, Yoruba, and Mina, also sometimes referred to as Sudanese slaves, were chosen as “house servants.” So important were enslaved Angolans to the sugar producing regions of Brazil that the remark was current in the seventeenth century that: without sugar there is no Brazil and without Angola there is no sugar (1981, p. 14).

It must be stated, however, that the terms, Angola, Congo, Gambia, Whydah, Papaw are relatively imprecise when trying to identify particular groups. The terms Ibo and Mandingo are more precise but not necessarily correct. For example, terms such as Ibo, Calabar, Bonny, and Bite were sometimes used interchangeably and are therefore vague if not inaccurate: the first designates an ethnic group, the next two refer to political entities, and the fourth refers to a geographical area. Ibos inhabited the region containing all these features, but not all the people in the region were Ibos. The term Mandingo has a similar designation. Nonetheless, it is clear that South Carolinians had some attributes firmly in mind when they used these terms, and, whereas Bite, Bonny, Calabar, and Ibo are not coterminous, they do all pertain to the Niger Delta (Littlefield, 1981).

In the early days Africans in court cases were asked, “What is your nation?” Other slaves were also identified by their “African nations.” Most Africans were multi-lingual. Africans in the new world identified themselves by their nations and not “slave-traders” or “masters.” (1981, p. 41-42)

To deny that ethnicities existed in Africa and assume that the many and varied African ethnic designations recorded in documents in the Americas did not originate in Africa but were created in the Americas is worse than being named by others. It denies the root of peoples in Africa, including their names, homogenizes them, and renders them invisible. Africans are the
only people who have been subjected by scholars to this level of denial.

The study of African ethnicities in the Americas has been widely neglected during the past three decades. The influential Mintz-Price thesis was first published in 1976. It claimed extreme diversity among and random distribution of Africans brought to the Western hemisphere. The most influential conclusion of the Mintz-Price theses is flawed by its static approach to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as its projection of patterns supposedly found in one small place in the Americas to all of the Western hemisphere. (1981, p. 49)

Once Africans learned the language of the enslavers they could then identify themselves by their nations. The term “tribe” is a false term that implies “primitiveness.” (1981, p. 46)

There were 933 English voyages to West Central Africa.

Despite the staggering number of Africans introduced into the Americas during the Trans Atlantic slave trade and their crucial role in creating its wealth and forming its cultures their origins in Africa remain obscure. There is still a widespread belief among scholars as well as the general public that Africans dragged to various places in the Americas were fractionalized and diverse, culturally, and linguistically. Therefore, few of the newly arrived Africans could communicate with each other, and there was little or no basis for transmission of elements of their cultures to specific African regions and ethnicities to specific places in the Americas. This conclusion is based on anecdotal evidence as well as more complex errors in methodology. Over several generations, historians have cited statements by Europeans and American observers at various times and places in Africa and the Americas that in order to discourage revolts, communication among new Africans was suppressed. This was done by separating and fractionalizing the various African ethnicities during their transport on Atlantic slave trade voyages as well as after they arrived in
the Americas. Studies of the coastal origins on Atlantic slave trade voyages to particular places in the Americas have collapsed time, ignoring wave patterns, clustering voyages originating from particular African regions, and then presented this flawed conclusion as evidence to demonstrate great diversity in the origins of enslaved Africans. (2005, p. 55)

**African-American Citizenship**

Before addressing the question of African-American citizenship, it is critical to point out who was defined as a citizen in America. The definition of who was an American had already been established with the publication of J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s (1781) *Letters from an American Farmer*. In Letter III where he ask the question, “What is an American?” he makes several clear statements. He says:

> Here a man is free as he ought to be, nor is this pleasing equality as transitory as many others are. The next wish of this traveler will be to know whence came all these people. They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans has arisen. The eastern province must indeed be accepted as being the unmixed descendants of the Englishmen...What, then, is the American, this new man? He is either a European or the descendant of a European... (1781, p.68-69)

Following on the heels of Crevecoeur’s publication, Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1790, which excluded from citizenship all non-whites since the term “white” was primarily reserved for those of British Protestant descent (Spring, 2004). For African-Americans this decision as to whether or not they could be citizens of the United States had to be determined by the Supreme Court.

The idea of whether or not African-Americans could or should be citizens of the United States and entitled to educational opportunities was determined in the majority decision of Justice
Roger Taney in the famous Dred Scott vs. Sanford Case of 1857 (Fehrenbacher, 1978; Napolitano, 2009; Spring, 2004). There was a clear difference between those entitled to equal rights with equal character and abilities and those who were not. This was a difference between those who were viewed as fit and those who were examined as unfit. Society had to find a way to reduce the number of people viewed as being among the bad and defective races from those who were seen as normal (Brown II, 2005).

Inadequate people were looked upon as the reverse of what was normal. Here was the concern, since genocide and relocation were too expensive as President Abraham Lincoln stated in a speech he gave September 18, 1858 at Charleston, Illinois on the subject (Bennett Jr., 2000; Jacobs, et al., 1971). So what other way could be created to address the removal of this undesirable population? That new way was found in intelligence testing and psychometrics, which eventually turned into a very lucrative business (Hilliard III, 1995; Watkins, 2004).

People like Alfred Binet, Henry H. Goddard, Lewis M. Terman, and others would assist in this enterprise by starting with Army recruits; to develop an infallible tool to measure their innate intelligence and station in life (Gould, 1981). This would allow for the selection and removal of those people identified as high-grade defectives. These individuals could be, based on their test scores; tracked into vocational education and service occupations inside of the military and outside with the help of corporate sponsorship. Those who were considered to have the inability to pass the tests could then be placed in corporate aligned schools that would, in essence, remove their memories so far from its cultural base that they would be virtually useless to their own communities.

So what was the solution and objectives of the eugenicists? They had two main objectives; first, to strive to develop in the mind of the public an understanding of the principles of heredity to be followed by more specific studies of the theoretical and practical aspects of the eugenics program. Second, eugenics
education focused on the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of individuals for the fulfillment of their role as participants in family life, and especially as parents. By creating the myth of upward mobility and offering the ‘promise’ of societal ascension to virtually anyone, eugenicists successfully appealed to segments of the population whom were not members of the aristocracy by birth (Winfield, 2007).

Granville Stanley Hall was a leader of the Developmentalist Movement in Curriculum Studies who believed in the natural order of child development, which was based on what he called the cultural-epoch theory. That belief stated that children develop through stages of growth in the same way that cultures progressed through stages from savagery, to barbarism and finally to civilization. For Hall there was a great army of incapables, among whom were African-Americans and immigrants that were unequipped for the rigors of schooling or academic life since they had not evolved from the first stages of the cultural-epoch: savagery. The classical curriculum was utilized at many of the early African-American colleges, now known as Historically Black Colleges and universities or HBCUs; where Latin and Greek language texts were staples of the pedagogical and curricular process especially at Wilberforce University in Ohio (Ronnick, 2006; Stauffer, 2006; Garrett & Robbins, 2006). As stated by Kliebard, perhaps that is the reason why Granville Stanley Hall was later opposed to white students learning Latin and referred to it as Negro Studies. (2004, p. 42)

But the idea that Africa had no place in world history based on a supposed notion of its savagery and inferiority has its origins in philosophy. In his work the Philosophy of History, George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel stated that:

At this point we leave Africa not to mention it again…What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature… (1899/1956, p. 99)
So using Hegel’s definition of Africa’s place in world history, that is, one with no place in world history, Africans and African-Americans, by extension, could not be part of the nation’s curriculum planning. By 1895, another committee called the Committee of Fifteen was formed led by William T. Harris who was America’s leading Hegelian. This group of American educators, who were all trained in Germany, possessed a scientific outlook, which caused them to form the National Herbart Society, named in honor of their German teacher Johann F. Herbart. John Dewey was also a member of this society. Harris was most concerned with establishing curriculum based on the best resources of Western civilization that would perpetuate the culture of the white race and white American culture only (Bloom, 1987).

Based on this German model, universities were designed to pass on the great Western cultural heritage to it students. This is a heritage, which Jacques Berlinerblau (1999); Dinesh D’Souza (1995); E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (1996); and Arthur Schlesinger (1992) among others so strongly advocate today. In order for African-Americans to be considered minimally involved in the American body politic they would have to disavow their identity as African descendants and put on the mask of whiteness (Fanon, 1967).

This is particularly important considering the current accountability movement since publication of the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, to privatize public education and have corporate individuals dictate the direction of public education in schools which they would not allow their own children to attend because of their privileged positions and ability to have free will over educational choices for their children (Diamond, 2007; Greenblatt, 2011). At the same time any alternative agency which focuses on emancipatory thinking and autonomous direction in education is viewed as confrontational, radical or better yet, a threat to the status quo. This type of thinking by corporate moguls is not new, especially when it comes to the education of African-Americans and the Black Codes of the various states served as the vehicle
through which emancipatory thinking was debilitated.

The Black Codes and their Impact on African-Americans

Introduction

When we consider the lingering impact of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade on the African population of the United States, it is impossible to engage in a discourse about it without looking at its long-term consequences for educational outcomes for African-American residents and not discuss the effects of the “Code Noir” or Black Codes. These codes were established to ensure that African-Americans would never be able to acquire the type of literacy necessary to compete economically with the Northern industrialists and their Southern Planter cohorts. The consequences of having a literate population of Africans, who were initially perceived to be innately inferior children and incapable of self-government without guidance from their white superiors, created a fear factor in early America that has led to much of the disorder that permeates the African-American community today. Without an understanding of those rules, which were established in many Southern states, it will be virtually impossible to get at the root cause of some of the problems that have created a state of mental-slavery, which has maintained the under-development and stifled progress.

In order to maintain a state of mental-slavery and docility among African Americans it was necessary to keep them in the lowest state of ignorance and degradation thereby perpetuating a continual state of apathy. These ideas are best reflected in a statement made on January 11, 1832 by Senator Henry Berry (1832) to the Commonwealth of Virginia House of Delegates:

...we have only to go one step further - to extinguish the capacity to see the light, and our work would be completed. They would then be reduced to the level of the beast of the field, and we should be safe; and I am not certain that we would not do it, if we could
find the necessary process - and that under the plea of necessity. (1832, p.55)

The idea that whites saw it necessary to “extinguish the capacity to see the light,” is a very powerful statement. It will be a precursor to how the various states decided to implement laws through the Black Codes to ensure that any form of education that was intellectually uplifting would be crushed, whether it was an attempt by Africans free or enslaved. Before we address the question of the Black Codes and education, we have to address the question of citizenship. We have to ask and answer the question, who was entitled to be called a citizen and to whom was citizenship denied?

A year after George McDowell Stroud published Stroud’s Slave laws: A Sketch of the Laws Relating to Slavery in the Several States of the United States (1856), Supreme Court Justice Roger Brooke Taney wrote that African people were property and had no rights that white people should respect in the famous Dred Scott v. Sanford Case of 1875 (Fehrenbacher, 1978). This decision made institutional racism the law of the land. It also established the justification for the legal enslavement and economic exploitation of people of African descent (1856/2005, p.v).

In spite of the fact that many masters were not compelled by feelings of humanity and less restrained by the precepts of religion were less concerned about rights and more concerned about feelings of power. What was ironic during the period Stroud was writing and continuing into the present day, was the unmitigated willingness of a large portion of the American population to disregard notions of morality, manifested primarily in the Christian message and to adopt a political, socio-economic, and legal system based upon human exploitation and moral degradation (1856/2005, p. viii). Based on racial subordination, Southerners developed immoral legal concepts that gave legitimacy to their way of life.

One of the earliest ways of doing this was to create in law a presumption that “Negro” status equaled slave status. This was initiated in a Maryland statute of 1663. It was based on the
assumption that the slave status was permanent or “durante vita” (for the duration of their lives). While these laws covered every aspect of life for descendants of Africans, from who could be a slave, to freedmen being made slaves, to the amounts and types of labor that slaves could perform, to their relationship and connection with convicts, to food and clothing, punishment, to having no property ownership rights, and denial of the right to be witnesses against white people, etc.; this section will focus on some of the laws established in various states against the education of African-Americans (Trotter, Jr., 2001; Ekberg, et al., 1724/2005)

THE BLACK CODES AND THE DENIAL OF EDUCATION TO AFRICAN-AMERICANS

One of the most important institutions in the United States is the Educational system and the benefits that may accrue from the acquisition of book learning. The constitutions of virtually every state make it the duty of their respective legislatures to establish places of learning for its citizens. This was supposed to be true for whites as well as Black children, and the poor of every class and complexion. When it came to Black children, however, the laws were different. According to Stroud:

On the contrary, the benefits of education are withheld from the slave, and, I might add, from the free negro also (1856/2005, p. 138).

This law was enacted very early in South Carolina by an act in 1740, which stated:

Whereas the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconvenience, Be it enacted, That all and every person and persons whatsoever who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use to employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall for every such offence forfeit
the sum of one hundred pounds current money (1856/2005, p. 139).

This was followed in 1800, by this enactment:

Assemblies of slaves, free Negros, mulattoes, and mestizos, whether or of all or any of such description of persons, or of all or any of the same and of a proportion of white persons, met together for the purpose of mental instruction in a confined or secret place... are declared to be an unlawful assembly (1856/2005, p. 139).

In Virginia, according to the Code of 1849 stated:

Every assemblage of negroes for the purpose of instruction in reading and writing shall be an unlawful assembly... If a white person assembles with negroes for the purpose of instructing them to read or write, he shall be confined to jail not to exceed six months, and fined not to exceed one hundred dollars (1856/2005, p. 140).

In Georgia, three statutes were enacted. The first was in 1770 that was very similar to the South Carolina statute of 1740. Then there was one issued in 1829 which stated:

If any slave, negro or free person of colour, or any white person, shall teach any other slave, negro or free person of colour to read or write either written or printed characters, the said free person of colour or slave shall be punished by fine and whipping, or fine or whipping, at the discretion of the court...” (1856/2005, p. 141).

In 1830, this legislation further occurred in Georgia:

If any person shall teach any slave, negro or free person of colour to read or write either written or printed characters, or shall procure, suffer or permit a slave, negro or person of colour to transact business for him in writing, such person so offending shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction, shall be punished by fine, or imprisonment in the common jail, or both, at the discretion of the court (1856/2005, p. 141).

By act of the assembly of Louisiana in 1830 a law was passed
All persons who shall teach or cause to be taught any slave in the state to read or write shall, on conviction thereof... be imprisoned not less than one or more than twelve months (1856/2005, p. 142).

North Carolina would not allow slaves to be made acquainted with arithmetic calculations, whilst she sternly interdicts reading and writing to a slave. She makes it highly penal, also, to give or sell any books or pamphlets to a slave. Similar laws were passed in Alabama, Mississippi, and other slave holding states. Comparable laws were also passed in several Northern states (Aptheker, 1973; DuBois, 1998; Woodson, 1969).

These are just a few examples of the way laws were enacted throughout the south to ensure that the descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States would be deprived of any educational opportunities that would be perceived a threat to the master-slave relationship. Such differences, in statutable enactments on the same subject, suggest several observations. One of the most obvious is, that a being whose desire for mental improvement is so strong as to require such powerful means of repression must have been intended for a higher destiny than “to live without knowledge and without the capacity to make anything his own, and to toil that another may reap the fruits:” and also that there is great reason to believe his subjection to the uncontrolled authority of another, which is alleged to be inherent and inseparable from slavery, must be both a mistake and an injustice (Anderson, 1998; Stroud, 1856/2005).

**Conclusion**

It is apparent from the following presentation that the cavalierly spread myth that no one knows where the Africans who became known as negroes, Negroes, Black, and African-Americans came from is an obvious misrepresentation of the evidence. That their
heritage was taken away from them during the “seasoning” process of slavery and that their heritage was therefore lost and untraceable is a myth. A myth perpetuated by those White academicians who found it in their interest to create a historiography of the slavery experience that centered on the experience of the slavocracy and the master perception of that reality and not the Africans who were enslaved. This is consistent with the silence, avoidance, intentional, or unintentional misrepresentation of the TASTS in the nation’s schools in general, and Illinois in particular, warranted the Commissions attention.

By not only denying the national realities of these Africans who were all known by the nations they represented and were clearly distinguished by the phenotypes, cultures, and languages they communicated in. It is well known that slave owners preferred certain African nations to others and could clearly distinguish one form another. Anyone who has spent some significant time on the continent of Africa and observed the faces of the various peoples there, whether one travels in West, East, North, or South Africa; since enslaved Africans were exported from all over the continent of Africa and not just the West coast; it will be more than apparent that those faces of Africa stare right back at us. Those nations, e.g., Fon, Yoruba, Koramante, Ibo, Igbo, Ewe, and others.

These Africans were skilled also as the list of their talents outlined above attest. Yet the perception is that these Africans were dumb, uncouth, savages who were incapable of moving an inch without the direction of the slave owner or his overseers. The fact that there is not a single antebellum mansion, house, monument; not one tobacco, rice, or cotton field, mine or railroad that was not built by the hands and minds of Africans in the United States as the entire beltway of the Capital in Washington, D.C. will demonstrate.

Even with the obvious skills necessary to build what would become the most powerful economic machine in Western European history, it was still felt that providing these Africans with the ability to read and write in the language of the enslavers was a
crime. There is an obvious fear factor inherent in such claims. If the Africans learned how to read and write, they would then be able to critically analyze their circumstance and challenge the system of servitude in which they found themselves. The effect of that reality was too much to bear for a group of Western Europeans who themselves were not that much more knowledgeable, in terms of book learning, than the very Africans they were holding in bondage. In fact, while little known, there were many Africans who were brought to the shores of the United States who were quite literate but in their own languages, most of them were practitioners of Islam (Alford, 1977; Diouf1998; Mirzai, et al., 2009; Said, 2001). If fact, it was so important to use terror and the threat of death to ensure that no one, not the enslaved or the beneficent slave holder, would ever allow the enslaved to receive the rudiments of an education in the United States.

The end result the tragic situation that the descendants of those Africans find themselves in currently in the United States educational system. A system that has been designed to lace a heavy emphasis on their supposed inferiority and inability to engage in higher order thinking. A system that perpetrates institutional racism by feeding the school to prison pipeline that has affected so many African Americans and ensuring that through the process of what the late Dr. Bobby E. Wright termed “menticide” or, “the deliberate and systematic destruction of a group’s mind with the ultimate objective being its extirpation of that group.” (1981, p. 16)

This article is a step in the direction of locating a space in which people of African descent in the United States can find balance in their lives and realize that they too have a past that is verifiable even if they are, in many cases, unable to pinpoint the location and disembarkation point of their ancestors through the “Maafa.” The Maafa is the “rupturing” of African consciousness, identity, and culture through external sensorial information structures and ideas that has resulted in a shattered consciousness and fractured African identity. The reality of Africans coming from somewhere and
belonging to someone is a significant starting point for finding ones way back home to their past or what is called “Sankofa” or “going back to fetch” the African past.
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