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A portrait of Washington ("Wash") Edwards, ca. 1889. On the reverse side is the following: "Was born in Africa & belong[?] to the state. Was one of the captives sold or traded to old Mr. Monroe Edwards & was brought to Texas before the Mexican War several years & was at the battle of San Jacinto & at that time bels to Col. Hill. He left a wife & children in Africa. Still speaks his native language when he meets one who can talk with him of whom one or two remain out of the many that were landed here at Time Uncle Wash came - Wash says they his companions that still live were little boys when they were brought to Texas - A native African brought to this co. by Monroe Edward in the early Thirties - and landed on the Bernard River a few miles West of Columbia." *Courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission.*

Notes and Documents

The Origins of the African-Born Population of Antebellum Texas: A Research Note

BY SEAN M. KELLEY AND HENRY B. LOVEJOY*

SOMETIME IN 1834 OR 1835, A SIXTEEN YEAR-OLD BOY NAMED OJO disembarked from a small sailing vessel on the San Bernard River and scrambled up the muddy bank to a camp carved out of the forested bottomland. The camp—“plantation” would be too grandiose a word—belonged to James Fannin, recently arrived from Georgia, now a landowner and slave trader in Texas. Ojo was one of a few dozen newly arrived African-born men and women that Fannin had smuggled into Texas from Cuba, and in due time would become one of a community of what was probably several hundred Yoruba-speakers on the lower Brazos River. Ojo had managed to survive the final, chaotic collapse of the Oyo Empire where he was raised, only to experience capture and what was likely the first of many sales over the next few years. He endured the physically and emotionally painful march to the coast and a wait of unknown duration in the squalor of the barracoons near a lagoon on the Bight of Benin. He lived through the Middle Passage and may even have survived an outbreak of cholera en route to Texas from Cuba. But Ojo thrived as well as can be expected under the bleak conditions of Texas plantation society. In 1845, ten years after landing, he was married to a woman named Mary and was the father of five children ranging from one to eight years of age. Seventeen years after that, in 1862, Ojo and Mary appear to have been still together, and living with at least three of their children on the same plantation. After that, Ojo disappears from the record.¹

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¹ Ojo's life in Texas is documented in Probate Files Nos. 162, 347, and 761, Brazoria County Probate Records, Office of the County Clerk (Brazoria County Courthouse Angleton, Texas).

Historians have long known that the population of African-born slaves in antebellum Texas was quite sizable, in proportion perhaps larger than any other southern state. The first professional historian to write about them was Eugene C. Barker in 1902, who interviewed several eyewitnesses who had encountered the Africans in the 1830s. Since Barker, a number of scholars have collectively demonstrated that the illegal introduction of African-born slaves to Texas by way of Cuba occurred sporadically right up to the Civil War, but that the majority arrived during the Texas Revolutionary period. In all, Texas historians have succeeded in documenting an activity whose clandestine nature has foiled countless researchers elsewhere.²

Yet for all this success in documenting the smuggling of African-born slaves and their presence on Texas plantations, the geographic, linguistic, and cultural origins of the people themselves have been difficult to uncover. The necessary evidence simply did not survive, largely because they arrived via the intra-Caribbean slave trade, resulting in an extra degree of documentary separation from ports of embarkation in Africa to their final destination in Texas. One piece of evidence, a “vocabulary” of everyday words compiled by William Fairfax Gray, who encountered groups of Africans on several occasions in 1836, could have helped answer the question, but this wordlist has not survived. A tantalizing reference to African origins was documented in a case heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in regard to a dispute over some slaves owned by planter David Randon. In his presentation to the court, Thomas League, a Galveston merchant, was asked whether slavery existed among the “Lucame” people, an obvious rendering of the word “Lucumi,” a designation often applied to Yoruba-speakers in the Spanish Americas. Apart from that offhand reference, no other document links the Africans to any specific place in Africa.³

² Eugene C. Barker, “The African Slave Trade in Texas,” *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 6 (October 1902): 145–158; Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 46; Cary Cordova, “The Enslaved People of the Patton Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas,” <<http://carycordova.com/research/patton-plantationnamesproject.pdf>> [Accessed Apr. 10, 2015]; Earl Wesley Fornell, *The Galveston Era: The Texas Crescent on the Eve of Secession* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961); Sean M. Kelley, “Blackbirders and Bozales: African Born Slaves on the Lower Brazos River of Texas in the Nineteenth Century,” *Civil War History* 54 (December 2008): 406–423; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: A Plantation Society in the Texas Borderlands, 1821–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers: The Foreign Slave Trade in the United States after 1808* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007); Fred Robbins, “The Origins and Development of the African Slave Trade into Texas” (M.A. Thesis, University of Houston, 1972). On the transatlantic slave trade to the United States, see David Eltis, “The U.S. Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1644–1867: An Assessment,” *Civil War History* 54 (December 2008): 347–388.

³ Paul D. Lack, (ed.), *The Diary of William Fairfax Gray: From Virginia to Texas, 1835–1837* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1997), 141; “David Randon, Plaintiff in Error, v. Thomas Toby,” in Stephen K. Williams (ed.), *Cases Argued & Decided in the Supreme Court of the United States, 1850–1851, 9, 10, 11, 12, Howard, Book 13, Lawyers’ Edition* (Rochester, N.Y.: Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Co., 1901), 500.

Since people born in Africa likely made up a significant proportion of the “charter generation,” or early arrivals who set the tone for those who followed, of Texas slaves, this dearth of information on where people came from in Africa has constituted a major gap in our understanding of the region’s history. As a small, but significant portion of Texas population, Africans likely contributed to early-nineteenth Texas society and culture. However, the absence of any clues to their provenance has made it next to impossible to begin exploring their influences in the southern borderlands. Knowing when and where people came from in West Africa will help unravel the formation of early Afro-Texan communities and their influence on American history and culture at large.⁴

New data and methods offer a way around the evidentiary impasse. In 2002, historians G. Ugo Nwokeji and David Eltis developed a methodology whereby it is possible to determine the likely ethno-linguistic origins of enslaved Africans through an analysis of documented African names.⁵ For this article, we have applied this method to a list of 119 African names compiled from Texas probate inventories, plantation ledgers, and census rolls. This article will re-examine the African-born population in Texas beginning with an overview of the circumstances of their arrival, which was via the trans-Atlantic and inter-Caribbean slave trade through Cuba. Next, we will examine the methodology behind the interpretation of documented African names, and based on our analysis, we will demonstrate that upwards of 40 percent of these people had Yoruba names, while another 17 percent of this sample had Igbo names. We will conclude with a brief discussion, more suggestive than conclusive, of the implications of these African origins for Texas slave society and culture. Although a detailed exploration of the subject is beyond the scope of the present piece, the data presented here should provide a solid foundation for future interpretation of the historical and archaeological evidence.

The African presence in Texas dates to as early as 1528, when the man historians know as Estevanico washed ashore near Galveston Island along with several other survivors of the ill-fated Narváez expedition. Thereafter, various individuals and groups of African-born people likely lived at various times in Spanish Texas over the succeeding three centuries, even though no documentation for their presence in the region is extant.⁶

⁴ On “charter generations” in American slavery, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1998), 12–13.

⁵ G. Ugo Nwokeji and David Eltis, “The Roots of the African Diaspora: Methodological Considerations in the Analysis of Names in the Liberated African Registers of Sierra Leone and Havana,” *History in Africa* 29 (January 2002): 365–379.

⁶ The presence of African-descended people in Spanish Texas (along with Coahuila), while small, has received some attention. It is far from clear how many of these early residents were born in Africa, but it is

Africans only began arriving in Texas in significant numbers in the years immediately prior to 1820, as cotton cultivation took hold in the Mississippi River Valley. Most of them, however, did not remain in Texas. With no plantations to speak of, Texas had quite simply very little demand for slave labor. On the other hand, its status as a border province adjacent to Louisiana, where demand was high and supplies constricted by federal ban on imported slaves, proved an irresistible temptation to smugglers, who landed their captives on Galveston Island and points east and then carried them across the Sabine River. While most of the captive laborers in Louisiana likely arrived legally via the interstate slave trade, it is quite clear that several thousand were Africans who were either brought directly from Africa or had been transshipped from the Caribbean. Although it is conceivable that a small number of those who landed in Texas before 1820 stayed there or that a few may have been carried back into Texas from Louisiana in later years, the total was likely very low. This first period of involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade therefore contributed to the Africanization of Louisiana's slave population but had almost no impact on that of Texas.⁷

With the arrival of cotton planting in the 1820s, Texas developed a market for enslaved labor. The first Africans to live and work on a Texas cotton plantation arrived with Jared Groce, the man often referred to as "the first planter in Texas." Groce quite famously arrived in Texas from Alabama in 1821 at the head of a column of over ninety slaves. Less known is the fact that in 1817, just over three years before his arrival in Texas, Groce had been an accomplice of David Mitchell, the former governor of Georgia and the U.S. government's agent to the Creek Nation. Mitchell exploited the confusion surrounding the Creek War and the Florida Patriot War to hide the importation of several hundred Africans through Amelia Island in Spanish Florida, just south of the Georgia border. Groce managed to seize hold of an unknown number of Africans and, after apparently defrauding his partner, moved to Texas. While Groce's ownership of African slaves cannot be documented conclusively, it is almost certain that some, perhaps even many, of those he marched into Texas had been among those landed at Amelia Island only a few years earlier. If so, the Africans at Groce's plantation in present-day Waller County were geographically isolated from the larger population of Africans in the province. As we will see in a moment, most of the Africans in Texas arrived

reasonable to suppose that most were born in Mexico. See Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 10–11; Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519–1821* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 206–207; Carlos Manuel Valdés and Ildefonso Dávila, *Esclavos Negros en Saltillo* (Saltillo: Ayuntamiento de Saltillo y Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, 1989).

⁷ Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 20–68; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 193–196.



Location of Yoruba and Igbo linguistic groups in Africa.

more than ten years later from Lower Guinea via Cuba and were clustered in present-day Brazoria County, about one hundred miles to the south of Groce's plantation. And arriving in Texas with so many captives as early as he did, Groce was something of an outlier. It would be more than a decade before any other Texas slaveholder would possess as many enslaved people as he. Finally, Groce's Amelia Island captives appear to have come from the Upper Guinea Coast, a region culturally and linguistically different from the Lower Guinea.⁸

⁸ On Jared Groce, see James Woodrick, *Bernardo: Crossroads, Social Center, and Agricultural Showcase of Early Texas* (n.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011). On Groce's involvement in illegal slave importations, see *Slaves Imported by and Indian Agent Contrary to Law*, 17th Cong., 1st Sess., 1822, S. Docs., Pub. 529; Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers*, 63–64. The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD2) lists two slave ships arriving at Amelia Island in 1817. The *Jesús Nazareno* (#41885) purchased its captives in the Senegambia. Where the second vessel, the *Nuestra Señora de Monserrate* (#41894), pur-

Groce's plantation notwithstanding, the African population of antebellum Texas had its roots in the activities of several smugglers, or "blackbirders" as they were sometimes called, who operated during the cotton boom of the 1830s that coincided with the Texas Revolution. By this time, the cotton-planting potential of the Austin Colony and other regions of Texas was recognized widely, and increasing numbers of planters and would-be planters had begun to arrive. During these years, the enslaved population of Texas was concentrated in just a few areas where fertile soils and convenient water transportation made plantation agriculture viable. The most important of these localities was the part of the Austin Colony closest to the Gulf Coast in the area that eventually became Brazoria County. This area was home to several well-connected families who were developing their vast tracts of land on the Brazos and San Bernard River into the wealthiest plantations in Texas.⁹

The "Flush Times" of the 1830s led to high domestic slave prices in the United States, and many Texas planters, especially those who were fleeing bad debts, could not afford the high prices at New Orleans.¹⁰ As a result, a new system developed, whereby merchants went to Cuba to buy slaves at cheaper prices and bring them to Texas. The half-dozen or so known participants in the Cuba-Texas slave trade fell into two categories. The first consisted of planters who bought enslaved Africans for their own needs. For example, the McNeel brothers, who owned several plantations on the lower Brazos River, actually went to Cuba themselves to buy slaves. The second category consisted of smugglers who brought enslaved Africans from Cuba in hopes of selling them to plantation owners. Monroe Edwards, who would soon go on to fame as a confidence man, was the most prolific speculator in African captives.¹¹

There is some suggestion that both the McNeels and Edwards purchased African men and women who had been liberated from illegal Cuban slave ships and were therefore technically free. As rumor and later lore would have it, the Africans' free status allowed the smugglers to evade U.S. efforts to enforce the 1808 ban on imported slaves. However, these stories are almost certainly untrue. The Africans who were carried into

chased its captives is unknown, but the fact that it was captured by the notorious slave trader Pedro Blanco strongly suggests it came from the area near Gallinas in Sierra Leone, Blanco's locus of operation. See <<http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1817&yearTo=1817&mjlsptimp=21500>> [Accessed Feb. 4, 2015].

⁹ Campbell, *Empire for Slavery*, 56-57; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 20-31.

¹⁰ These "Flush Times" of the cotton- and slavery-based economy during the 1830s across the Gulf South have been explored in a number of works. See, for examples, Joseph G. Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1854) and Joshua D. Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014).

¹¹ Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 48-56.

Texas were almost certainly not liberated Africans, or *emancipados*, as they were known in Cuba. For one thing, if false indentures or freedom papers really did give smugglers a free pass, then the number of illegally imported slaves in both Texas and the United States would have been much higher. Moreover, since the names of all *emancipados* were recorded in Cuba, we should expect that at least some of those from Texas might match, but none do. The Africans of Brazoria County were almost certainly slaves, not *emancipados*.¹²

Richard Robert Madden, an Irish-born hard-line abolitionist and the British government's superintendent for liberated Africans at Havana, described the complex networks that channeled Africans into Texas via Cuba. In a letter written to the Foreign Office in London, Madden charged that Thomas Toby, a New Orleans merchant, was the principal purchasing agent when most African-born people arrived to the Republic of Texas. Toby not only dealt directly with the Havana merchant George Knight & Co., but also the Galveston firm of Samuel May Williams, which was also known to have conducted business with the "blackbirder" Edwards. Madden also accused a merchant, known only as Cogley (sometimes spelled "Coigly"), who traded with Joseph H. Hawkins, a Brazos Valley planter. In one instance, Cogley left Cuba for Texas with sixty Africans, more than thirty of whom perished from cholera on the voyage. Although Madden suggested that the principal aim of these trade networks was to bring slaves to Louisiana, as had been the case in the 1810s, it seems much more likely that these networks supplied slaves to the Brazos River area. Moreover, Madden's report also says nothing about some of the other slave traders, such as the McNeels, James Fannin, or Ben Fort Smith, likely through a lack of information about the Texas slave market.¹³

The most recent estimates demonstrate that the total number of African-born people to reach Texas via the intra-Caribbean slave trade in the 1830s was approximately one thousand individuals.¹⁴ Ultimately, these people boarded slave ships in West Africa before reaching Cuba and could have come from a many ethno-linguistic groups, cultures, states, or societ-

¹² William Pitt Zuber to Eugene C. Barker, Mar. 12, 1902, Eugene C. Barker Papers (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin); Texian, *Life of Celebrated Munroe Edwards* (Boston: William White and H. P. Lewis, 1842). A Court of Mixed Commission was established in Cuba after Great Britain and Spain signed a bilateral treaty in 1817 to suppress the transatlantic slave trade. Between 1824 and 1841, this court with both British and Spanish representation condemned forty-four slave ships and issued emancipation certificates for nearly 11,000 individuals. As per international law, these people became "apprentices" or "free laborers" serving terms of five-to-seven years, but were frequently resold into slavery. See Henry B. Lovejoy, "The Havana Slave Trade Commission," <www.liberatedafricans.org> [Accessed Aug. 12, 2015]; Lovejoy, "The Registers of Liberated Africans of the Havana Slave Trade Commission: Transcription Methodology and Statistical Analysis," *African Economic History* 38 (2010): 107–136.

¹³ FO 84/216, f.284-286, British National Archives; "Randon v. Toby," in Williams, *Cases Argued & Decided in the Supreme Court of the United States*.

¹⁴ Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 48–50.

ies in Africa's interior. Who, then, were these Africans in Texas? Where did they come from in Africa? And, what were their conditions of enslavement? To address these questions, the focus of this article turns to a list of 119 African names documented in Texas between 1836 and 1880. This list was generated from a range of sources, including probate inventories, plantation records, the U.S. Censuses of 1870 and 1880 (both population and agricultural schedules), and newspapers. It is important to note that this sample only includes documented names that were clearly transliterations from indigenous African languages. Many African-born people in Texas were assigned and used English names, which tell us very little about African origins, and have therefore been omitted. Due to the relative size of this group of people, this sample cannot represent the total enslaved population from Africa in Texas, but it does provide a glimpse into the African regions of origin for a select group.

Tracing the origins of Africans and African-descent populations in the Americas through names alone presents a challenge. Beginning in 1977, teams of historians, led by David Eltis, have been meticulously transcribing African names taken from registers of liberated Africans recorded at the Courts of Mixed Commission in Freetown (Sierra Leone), Havana, and St. Helena. The African Names Database currently amounts to a collection of biographical data for over 92,000 men, women, and children liberated by British anti-slaving efforts between 1808 and 1862. This information is now accessible on a website known as the *African Origins* project, which draws on a broad audience with knowledge of African languages to interpret this large collection of documented names in order to help untangle the ethno-linguistic composition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in this period.¹⁵

The interpretation of documented African names recorded in the African Names Database is a relatively simple and effective method to determine likely ethno-linguistic origins. Since the date and port of embarkation are known, it is possible to assess the transliterated African names of people leaving specific places. Between 1822 and 1843, "Ojo," and variations such as "Ojoe," "Ohjoe," or "Odjoe" appear thirty-seven times in the African Names Database. Accordingly, people named Ojo boarded slave ships at Lagos (twenty-seven), Badagry (seven), and Ouidah (three). In 2014, Olatunji Ojo, a native Yoruba-speaker and names specialist at Brock University in Canada, has concluded that these individuals were almost certainly Yoruba-speakers because "Ojo" is a common Yoruba name. The Yoruba people are one of the most dominant ethno-linguistic groups in

¹⁵ Richard Anderson, Alex Boruki, Daniel Domingues da Silva, David Eltis, Paul Lachance, Philip Misevich, and Olatunji Ojo, "Origins of Captives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Crowd-Sourcing and the Registers of Liberated Africans, 1808–1862," *History in Africa* 40 (October 2013): 165–191.

the immediate hinterland to the ports of Lagos, Badagry, and Ouidah, all on the Lower Guinea Coast. This name is not common among the myriad other African ethno-linguistic groups, whether from the Upper Guinea Coast or West Central Africa. Therefore, we can deduce that the “Ojo” documented along the Brazos River in Texas in the 1830s was likely a Yoruba-speaker from the Yoruba-speaking region of Lower Guinea.

Other names from the Texas sample, such as “Ackebuddy,” “Assenbo-gee,” and “Bancoly” clearly sound like the modern Yoruba names Akinbode, Osungbuji, and Bankole, respectively. In comparison, “Cudjo” and “Coffee” are Twi-sounding names Kudjo and Kofi, while “Cheneroo” is likely Chinaaru, an Igbo name that is more common to the Bight of Biafra hinterland. Documented names are representative of the languages of specific African regions, even if they cannot relay a specific point of origin. In other cases, the documented name might not be a name at all, rather an indication of an ethno-linguistic group. For example, “Ega” could be an Ibibio name Eka, or indeed, a reference to Egba, which is a Yoruba subgroup; “Ego” could refer to Igbo; “Ausa” to Hausa.¹⁶

One of the major drawbacks with this methodology relates to the original spelling recorded in the historical source. In West Africa, most non-Muslim, sub-Saharan West African cultures did not have orthographies for the languages they spoke until the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Moreover, most African-born slaves were illiterate in European languages. In addition, the clerks who documented African names had a very limited understanding of African languages and dialects. It is sometimes impossible to know exactly what the clerk was trying to spell, and the transcription requires much scrutiny of the nineteenth-century handwriting. As a result, there will always be a certain margin of error, whether at the point the original source was made in the past or during their transcription in the present.¹⁷

Once the transcription is formally agreed upon by the historians, it is possible to analyze names by reading them out loud to someone with knowledge of African languages associated with the region of origin. Based on the relative success of this methodology, *African Origins* was designed to assist in identifying over 90,000 names through crowd-sourcing people with knowledge of languages, naming practices, and ethnic groups in sub-Saharan West Africa. This project is currently under development, although the interpretations of a substantial number of names are now available online and used to help identify the people in the Texas sample.¹⁸

¹⁶ Olatunji Ojo to Henry Lovejoy, Nov. 28, 2014, e-mail.

¹⁷ Lovejoy, “Registers of Liberated Africans of the Havana Slave Trade Commission,” 107–136.

¹⁸ See <http://www.african-origins.org> [Accessed Feb. 3, 2015].

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN NAMES DOCUMENTED IN TEXAS BY BROAD WEST AFRICAN REGIONS, 1830–1835

REGION	INDIVIDUALS	PERCENT
Upper Guinea Coast	8	6.7
Lower Guinea Coast	87	73.1
West Central Africa	5	4.2
Not yet identified	19	16.0
TOTAL	119	

The 119 names from Texas present an additional challenge because the port of embarkation is unknown. Knowing that a person named “Ojo” boarded a ship at a port in the Bight of Benin greatly increases the likelihood that the name is Yoruba and the person a Yoruba-speaker. To solve this problem, we have cross-referenced the Texas sample with the African Names Database in order to solicit interpretations and potential ports of embarkation. For example, the name “Ojo” and its variant spellings are only associated with the stretch of coast between Ouidah and Lagos where Yoruba speakers were known to depart in great numbers.¹⁹ Therefore, it can be reasonably deduced that references to “Ojo” and other Yoruba names in Texas are a strong indication of the general point of origin.

It was also possible to isolate names from the Lower Guinea Coast into more specific regions. The Bight of Benin represented more than half of this grouping (forty-eight individuals), followed by the Bight of Biafra (seventeen individuals), while the remainder was non-specific to the Gold Coast, Bight of Benin, and Bight of Biafra inclusive. The Upper Guinea Coast and West Central Africa were far less represented and will be discussed following a closer analysis of our interpretations.

In many circumstances, it was impossible to correlate certain names recorded in Texas with any West African regions; hence, the “not yet identified” grouping. Besides the potential problems with the original source and transcription errors, the two main reasons for not identifying a name were: 1) there is not a comparable spelling in African Names Database, and 2) the name was multiethnic. For example, the name “Begina” did not have a clear equivalent in the names database, with the closest examples being “Bagana,” “Wagina,” and “Magina.” Multiethnic names, such as “Abo,” could be associated with numerous ports located anywhere between Senegambia and the Bight of Biafra. It is likely a short form of the Abubakar, or Abu, which is a Muslim name common in many differ-

¹⁹ Paul E. Lovejoy, “The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,” in Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (eds.), *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 33–34. On the name “Ojo,” see Augustine H. Agwuele, “Yorubaisms’ in African American ‘Speech’ Patterns,” in *ibid.*, 333.

**TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN NAMES DOCUMENTED IN TEXAS
BY ETHNOLINGUISTIC GROUP**

LANGUAGE OF NAME	INDIVIDUALS	PERCENT
Yoruba	37	30.6
Igbo	7	5.8
Mende	5	4.1
Yoruba, Twi	4	3.3
Twi	3	2.5
Yoruba, Igbo	3	2.5
Yoruba, Mende	2	1.7
Adamawa, Fulfulde	1	0.8
Adamawa, Fulfulde, Muslim	1	0.8
Hausa	1	0.8
Igbo, Fon	1	0.8
Igbo, Ibibio	1	0.8
Igbo, Igede, Bulu	1	0.8
Igbo, Muslim	1	0.8
Muslim	1	0.8
Muslim, Limba	1	0.8
Kissi	1	0.8
Kongo	1	0.8
Limba, Edo	1	0.8
Mende, Not yet identified	1	0.8
Ngemba, Kenyang, Kongo	1	0.8
Swahili	1	0.8
Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo	1	0.8
Yoruba, Ibibio	1	0.8
Yoruba, Tikar	1	0.8
Not yet identified	42	34.7
TOTAL	121	

ent ethno-linguistic groups. Without knowing the port of embarkation, we therefore cannot reasonably speculate a broad region of origin.

Using the methodologies outlined above, it has been possible to interpret just over half of the documented Africans names in the Texas sample (see Table 2). Yoruba names represented at least one third of the total sample, if not more. Another 12 multiethnic names could have been Yoruba, suggesting this total could jump higher than 40 percent. After multiethnic names are tallied, the second largest group was Igbo, which could represent as much as 12 percent of the sample, followed by Mende and

**TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF ENSLAVED AFRICANS FROM WEST AFRICA
TO CUBA BY BROAD REGION, 1830–1836**

REGION	INDIVIDUALS	PERCENT
Upper Guinea Coast	14,006	11.3
Gold Coast	1,319	1.1
Bight of Benin	22,786	18.4
Bight of Biafra	58,617	47.2
West Central Africa	19,230	15.5
Southeast Africa	8,158	6.6
TOTAL	124,116	

Muslim names. The names not yet identified still require further analysis, and any future interpretations may alter these results. It can be assumed that most of the individuals in the Texas sample crossed the Atlantic in the years between 1830 and 1836, when an estimated 124,116 landed in Cuba (Table 3).

According to these estimates, the Lower Guinea Coast—Gold Coast, Bight of Benin, and Bight of Biafra combined—represents about two thirds of the total transatlantic slave trade to Cuba in this period. These estimates partly explain how there were more individuals documented in Texas from this region than any other. The preliminary analysis of African names documented in Texas in the 1830s demonstrates a very high representation of people from the Bight of Benin, followed by the Bight of Biafra. The large number of individuals from the Lower Guinea Coast reflects the importance of this region on the Havana slave market.

Although the Upper Guinea Coast and West Central Africa are represented, their numbers are marginal when compared with the Lower Guinea Coast. From the Upper Guinea coast, five individuals had likely Mende names, while one was likely Kissi. The Mende and Kissi are two ethnic groups living in parts of modern-day Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. They could have boarded slave ships anywhere along three hundred miles of coast between the Gallinas and Sherbro Islands. It is therefore hard to know more about the origins of a few individuals without a specific port of embarkation. Likewise, it is even more difficult to know much about six people from West Central Africa who could have arrived from anywhere between modern-day Gabon and Angola.

The names data shed light on several enduring questions about the African population of the Lower Brazos Valley. First, they confirm earlier speculation that the African-born population, while linguistically and culturally diverse, nevertheless contained a critical mass of people who

shared a common linguistic background, Yoruba.²⁰ Between 1817 and 1836, Oyo, one of the most dominant Yoruba-speaking kingdoms, collapsed due to jihad emanating from the Sokoto Caliphate and shifting alliances among the numerous Yoruba-speaking kingdoms of Owu, Ijebu, Egba, Ife, Owo, among others, and non-Yoruba kingdoms of Dahomey, Nupe, Borgu, Mahi, among others. Oyo's disintegration resulted in the shipment of many Oyo residents to the Americas.²¹ An analysis of 3,661 names for liberated Africans documented in Cuba between 1824 and 1836, arriving from ports in the Bight of Benin has demonstrated that upwards of 80 percent were Yoruba. By applying ratios from these names data to overall estimates from the Bight of Benin to Cuba, the names data has shown that more than 31,000 Yoruba speakers landed in the Spanish colony between those years.²² The Yoruba names documented in the Texas data are likely an extension of the same migration stemming from the collapse of Oyo.

The fact that so many of the Africans in Texas came from Lower Guinea does not mean that communication among them was always easy. A large percentage, perhaps a majority of the Africans in Texas, including many who came from areas inland from the Bight of Biafra, were not Yoruba speakers. Moreover, the Yoruba language itself has several different dialects, all of which could have hampered communication. But these problems may have been offset by the simple fact that many from the region were of necessity multi-lingual.²³ William Fairfax Gray, compiler of the now-lost "vocabulary" of African words and who observed a group of about fifty Africans during the Runaway Scrape of 1836, noted that some of them "gave the same names to common things" but that others did not. But quite significantly, he did not say that they could not understand each other, apart from one girl who "held no converse with the crowd" and who was "said to belong to a different tribe from any of the rest." The others sang and danced together during the evenings, suggestive of at least a basic ability to communicate. In short, the data appear to corroborate the notion that African speech communities existed on the Lower Brazos during the antebellum period.²⁴

The names data also support the notion that ties of language and cul-

²⁰ Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 50–54.

²¹ Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, c.1600–c.1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (1977; reprint: Aldershot, U.K.: Gregg Revivals, 1991), 261–299.

²² Henry B. Lovejoy, "Old Oyo Influences on the Transformation of Lucumi Identity in Colonial Cuba" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2012), 70–106.

²³ Bernard Heine and Derek Nurse (eds.), *African Languages: An Introduction* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92. Linguists estimate that about half of the population of modern Africa is multilingual. The proportion for pre-colonial Africa is probably not as high, but numerous documents make clear that it was extremely common.

²⁴ Lack (ed.), *The Diary of William Fairfax Gray*, 151.

ture were strong enough and pervasive enough to influence marriage decisions, at least in the plantation districts of Brazoria County where large numbers of Africans resided. Whenever possible, Africans partnered with other Africans, often forming enduring unions that resulted in large numbers of children. Of course, any preference for cultural or linguistic endogamy ran headlong into the demographic reality of a sex ratio skewed approximately 2:1 in favor of males. (We estimate that as little as 30 percent of the Texas sample was female.) But the desire in most cases to partner with someone of similar background seems clear. Probate inventories from the Fannin-Mims Plantation in Brazoria County reveal that three of eight married African men partnered with African women, while three married American-born women (two were married to women of unknown birth).²⁵

Whether the three men who married African American women would have preferred a partner of similar African background can never be known, but a look at African women's marriage patterns suggests they might have. Outnumbered by African-born men, African-born women (or at least those who lived in areas with a large African population) would have had much greater latitude in choosing a partner. The fact that all of the African-born women at the Fannin-Mims Plantation partnered with African-born men suggests this was the case. Moreover, the census of 1870, the first systematic record of the birthplace of the state's black population, revealed that twenty-eight of thirty-three African-born women were married to African-born men. Finally, the names data for the population of unmarried African men highlight once again the probability that these relationships were rooted in common language and culture. Only one of the seven unmarried African-born men (with African names) at the Fannin-Mims Plantation appears to have come from the Bight of Benin. The other six appear to have come from Upper Guinea, the Gold Coast, and West Central Africa, suggestive of a linguistic and cultural isolation that contrasts with the sociability of the Yoruba-speakers.²⁶

The apparent endogamy of the African-born population reinforces the notion that Yoruba ethno-linguistic enclaves existed in Brazoria County. In fact, given what is known about the geographic distribution of the Africans, it seems possible that Yoruba speech communities extended beyond the confines of individual cabins to entire neighborhoods. Three areas of

²⁵ Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 78. Unfortunately, because all of these couples included at least one spouse who gave a non-African name, it was not possible to check the probate inventories against the names data.

²⁶ Joseph Mims Probate Inventory, 1845, Probate File 347, Brazoria County Probate Records, Office of the County Clerk (Brazoria County Courthouse, Angleton, Texas). Two of the unmarried men, Ti and Jabbo, could not be matched with the names data. Two others, Jolloh and Quibe, appear to have come from Upper Guinea. One, Koffee, was probably a Twi speaker from the Gold Coast, and one, Gomay, appears to have come from West Central Africa. Archo is the only unmarried man at Mims who appears to have embarked from a Bight of Benin port, Lagos.

Brazoria County are known to have received large numbers of Africans in the 1830s: Gulf Prairie, Columbia, and the area around the Fannin-Mims Plantation.²⁷ What this influx meant in terms of cultural practice and identity is much more difficult to say. On that score, the names data are more suggestive than conclusive. Archaeological excavations of the Levi Jordan Plantation, which archaeologist Kenneth Brown has suggested reveal the persistence of a Kongolese-influenced spirituality, seem more likely to have derived from Yoruba practices, but that speaks more to probabilities, not certainties.²⁸

Within a few years of their arrival, the region's African-born population was numerically overwhelmed by African Americans from various parts of the United States. It is tempting to conclude that Texas's plantation quarters were culturally overwhelmed as well. After all, how could just a few hundred African-born men, women, and children, continue to speak their languages and practice their cultures while surrounded by so many English-speakers and Christians? But a great deal of scholarship on Africans elsewhere in the United States and in the Americas suggests that interactions between African-born slaves, African Americans, and Anglo Americans were never that simple. As Ira Berlin and others have emphasized, the earliest arrivals in many New World slave societies often constituted a "charter generation," establishing a set of cultural and social norms that later arrivals would often follow. By virtue of their prior arrival, members of the charter generation often wielded more influence than their numbers would otherwise suggest. For example, the high visibility of Akan names and cultural practices in the British Caribbean can be explained in part by the high proportion of Akan speakers in the colonies' early years, despite the fact that only about one in four of the captives taken to the region consisted of people who embarked from ports that drew on the Akan hinterland.²⁹

It is therefore quite possible that Texas plantations, especially those on the Lower Brazos and Colorado Rivers, were host to a similar dynamic. After all, the African-born population of the Lower Brazos arrived just as the region was maturing as a plantation society. Assuming 800–1,000 Africans arrived by 1840, and assuming most of them remained concentrated in and around Brazoria County, the African-born population would have, for a few years, made up more than half of the local enslaved population,

²⁷ Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 52–53.

²⁸ See Kenneth L. Brown, "Material Culture and Community Structure: The Slave and Tenant Community at Levi Jordan's Plantation, 1848–1892," in *Working toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the Plantation South*, ed. Larry E. Hudson Jr. (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 95–118.

²⁹ For statistics, see "Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database," <<http://slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces?yearFrom=1501&yearTo=1866>> [Accessed Sept. 3, 2015].

with Yoruba-speakers comprising a significant, possibly influential minority. None of this is to suggest that whatever practices the Yoruba-speakers brought with them were replicated in “pure” form. The conditions of slavery, mortality, the influx of American-born slaves, and the passage of time would have forced them to adapt and change. But the discovery that a large proportion of this early population likely spoke Yoruba makes a good presumptive case in favor of their influence as a regional charter generation. Discovering the actual content of the interactions between the African- and American-born populations awaits further historical and archaeological research, but as a result of the names data, we now have a much clearer picture of who the African-born Texans were and where they came from.³⁰

³⁰ See introduction to Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*.