

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY REFERENCES
TO THE
TRANS-ATLANTIC HUMAN TRADE
ON
AFRICATOWN, ALABAMA**

Compiled by Jessica Hanson under the guidance of Stephanie Bryan, Ann Chinn, and Ann Cobb
for the Middle Passage Ceremonies and Port Markers Project 2024.

SELECTED SECONDARY SOURCES:

- Brown, Margaret, director. 2022. *Descendant*. Participant, Night Tide Production, Take One Five Entertainment. Distributed by Netflix. **Chronicles the narrative of Africatown in Alabama and the descendants of the last enslaved Africans brought to the United States on the Clotilda. The documentary explores the community's history and the lives of those brought aboard the ship, emphasizing the discovery of the Clotilda wreckage in 2019, four decades after slave trading was criminalized as a capital offense.**
- Delgado, James P., Deborah E. Marx, Kyle Lent, Joseph Grinnan, Alexander DeCaro, Lisa D. Jones (Foreword), Stacey Hathorn (Foreword). 2023. *Clotilda: The History and Archaeology of the Last Slave Ship*. Maritime Currents: History and Archaeology. 232 pages. University of Alabama Press. **Chronicles the maritime research and archaeological efforts that led to the identification of the infamous Clotilda schooner, which illegally transported captured Africans to Alabama in 1860. The book details the forensic work that confirmed the wreck's identity, explores the ship's historical context within the slave trade, and**

reconstructs its appearance, presenting a comprehensive nautical biography of the vessel with insights into its career before becoming a slave ship.

Diouf, Sylviane A. 2007. *Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America*. Oxford University Press. Reconstructs the histories of 110 individuals from Benin and Nigeria, secretly brought to Alabama in 1860. She details their capture in Ouidah, experiences in the slave pen, and life in slavery alongside American-born enslaved individuals. Following emancipation, the group reunited, purchased land, and established African Town, governing it by customary African laws, preserving their regional language, and insisting on the use of African names in interviews to maintain connections with their families. Today, African Town remains home to descendants of the Clotilda survivors.

Durkin, Hannah. 2024. *The Survivors of the Clotilda: The Lost Stories of the Last Captives of the American Slave Trade*. Chronicles the harrowing journey of the Clotilda, the final slave ship to reach American shores in 1860, long after the federal ban on importing captive Africans. Through extensive archival and sociological research, Durkin unveils the lives of the ship's 110 captives (103 survivors), from their abduction in modern day Nigeria to their enslavement in Alabama and the emergence of African Town (later Africatown), even covering modern scholarship/connections on African American culture through Gee's Bend.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 2018. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*. Introduction by Deborah G. Plant, Foreword by Alice Walker. Amistad. In 1927, Zora Neale Hurston interviewed Cudjo Lewis, the last survivor of the "Clotilda" slave ship, in Plateau, Alabama. The resulting work, "Barracoon," captures Cudjo's firsthand account of his capture, the Middle Passage, and years in slavery, providing a poignant and powerful illustration of the tragedy of slavery and its enduring legacy, presented with Hurston's compassionate perspective and distinctive style. The book sheds light on the shared history and culture, making it an invaluable contribution to the understanding of the profound impact of slavery.

Langdon Roche, Emma. *Historic Sketches of the South: Drawings and Photographs by Author*. 1–148. The Knickerbocker Press, 1914. <https://www.loc.gov/item/14014314/> (stable link). The first to feature interviews with Cudjoe Lewis, a survivor of the Middle Passage on the illegal slave ship *Clotilda*, explores the ship's 1860 journey from Benin to Alabama. The work, inclusive of photographs and drawings, has become a vital resource for understanding Africatown's residents and the history of the *Clotilda*.

Murphy, Frederick, director. 2021. *Sweet Home Alabama: A Chief and His Protégé. A History Before Us* documentary. The short film delves into the parallel themes of survival, perseverance, and unapologetic preservation, focusing on Joycelyn M. Davis, a descendant of Chief Charles Lewis aboard the Clotilda. Davis shares her personal battle with cancer, highlighting how her

enslaved ancestors' legacy of overcoming adversity empowered her, while both she and Pastor Derek Tucker express their dedication to preserving the rich history of Africatown, USA, a community founded by Clotilda's survivors after the Civil War.

- Raines, Ben. 2022. *The Last Slave Ship: The True Story of How Clotilda Was Found, Her Descendants, and an Extraordinary Reckoning*. Simon & Schuster. The true story of the *Clotilda*, the last ship to bring enslaved Africans to the United States, scuttled and burned to conceal the crime. Raines details his quest to find the sunken wreck in the swamps of Alabama, unraveling the ship's perilous journey, rediscovery, and complex legacy. The narrative explores the enduring impact of slavery on three interconnected communities—the descendants of the enslaved, the African sellers, and the American enslavers—highlighting America's struggle to confront its traumatic past while celebrating the triumphs of Africatown, a community founded by *Clotilda's* survivors.
- Robertson, Natalie S. 2008. *The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Making of AfricaTown, USA: Spirit of Our Ancestors*. Praeger. Unique nonfiction work that explores the transatlantic smuggling expedition of the *Clotilda* during the illegal period of the slave trade. The book vividly depicts the captives' journey from West Africa to Mobile, Alabama in 1860 and traces their triumph over tragedy. Using ethnography, cartography, linguistics, and oral history, Robertson connects the *Clotilda* captives' story to their African origins, highlighting the lasting impact of slavery, Africanisms, and resistance in American culture, including debates on reparations.
- Tabor, Nick. 2023. *Africatown: America's Last Slave Ship and the Community It Created*. St. Martin's Press. Delves into the challenging history of a community established by those brought to America as slaves, exploring their resilience against racism and environmental challenges. The book recounts the arrival of the *Clotilda* in 1860, the last ship to smuggle enslaved Africans to the U.S., and the subsequent creation of Africatown outside Mobile. The community, enduring to the present, faces struggles, including environmental issues, industrialization, and a renewed effort to memorialize its history following the discovery of the *Clotilda's* remains.
- Waters, Charles and Irene Latham. 2023. *African Town*. Introduction by Joycelyn M. Davis, Descendant of Clotilda survivors. G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers. A poignant novel-in-verse that chronicles the illegal arrival of 110 Africans in Mobile, Alabama, in 1860 aboard the *Clotilda*. The book explores their harrowing journey from capture to plantation life, their desperate attempts to preserve their culture, and the establishment of African Town after the Civil War—a community that endures to the present day, told through 14 distinct voices, including that of the ship and the founder of African Town.

PRIMARY REFERENCES TO VESSEL:

SlaveVoyages Database [Link](#):

Year of Arrival	SlaveVoyages ID	Vessel Name	Voyage itinerary imputed port where began (ptdepimp) place	Voyage itinerary imputed principal place of slave purchase (mjbyptimp)	Voyage itinerary imputed principal port of slave disembarkation (mjslptimp) place	Captives arrived at 1st port	Captain's name
1860	36990	Clotilda	Mobile	Whydah, Ouidah	Mobile (Twelvemile Island)	108	Foster, William

Marine List. *Advertiser and Register* (Mobile, Alabama, 26, July 1859):
July 25, 1859 record proving *Clotilda* had been in use in the Port of Mobile:
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/237401151/?terms=clotilda&match=1>

MARINE LIST.

PORT OF MOBILE—JULY 25.

ARRIVED.

Schooner *Clotilda*, Wright, from Galveston, in ballast, to master.

Steamboat *LeGrande*, Cloudis, from Montgomery with 301 bales cotton

Steamboat *Jeanette*, Johnson, from Demopolis, with sundries

Steamboat *Lecompte*, Walker, from New Orleans.

Steamboat *California*, Myers, from New Orleans.

Steamboat *Florida*, Hopkins, from New Orleans.

Arrival of a Slaver at Mobile. *Montgomery Weekly Post* (18, July 1860):

July 18, 1860 record proving *Clotilda* arrived in Mobile with enslaved and distributed them to undisclosed locations on a steamboat; this number (124) differs from all other oral accounts of 110/109/108:

https://www.newspapers.com/image/355740818/?match=1&clipping_id=136995959

Arrival of a Slaver at Mobile.

MOBILE, July 12.—The schooner *Clotilda*, with one hundred and twenty-four Africans on board arrived in the bay to bay. A steamboat immediately took the negroes up the river.

Captain Timothy Meaher A Noted Steamboat Man and Importer of Slaves Dead. *Birmingham Post Herald* (4, March 1892):

This 1892 *obituary* entry clipping (below) seems to attempt to claim Timothy Meaher was innocent of accusations of illegally importing captives on the Clotilda(e); however, he was later proven not to have transported them himself but hired Captain William Foster (1860 arrival); the 160 number in this article also differs from other numbers noted in primary and secondary sources; it also contains racist implications of the white supremacist dominant 19th century:

https://www.newspapers.com/image/1000739939/?match=1&clipping_id=136996943

CAPTAIN TIMOTHY MEAHER,
A NOTED STEAMBOAT MAN AND IMPORTER
OF SLAVES, DEAD.
MOBILE, March 4. —Captain Timothy Meaher, a venerable steamboat man, died here this morning, aged 79 years. He was for many years identified with the business of the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers in the palmiest days of steamboating. He was noted as the importer of the last cargo of slaves brought to the United States. This was in the spring of 1861. He chartered the schooner S. Clotilde, which brought 160 negroes, and managed to spirit them into the canebrake, 100 miles up stream. News of the importation soon got abroad, and Meaher was arrested, tried, but proved that he had made every trip on his own boat, Toney, and the inference was that he had not had time to receive the negroes and personally superintend the hiding of them. He was discharged. If convicted, he would have suffered the death penalty. With the thirty negroes that fell to his share, he settled in a suburb of this city, where, being freed shortly after their arrival, they and their descendants have remained. They have never associated with other negroes, are but partially civilized, still use their native language and are ruled by the "Queen of their own choosing." They enjoy a good reputation for industry and honesty, and their colony is one of curiosities most eagerly viewed by sight-seers.

Cudjoe Saga Gaining Fame. *The Anniston Star* (4, October 1977):

This clipping (below) is one of many regional write-ups which were done in Alabama which better handled the historical record, as opposed to racist tropes of the 19th century. It documents the bet between Meaher and includes a more in depth history about Africa/Dahomey in

correlation with the *Clotilda*(e); however, there was still one locale Mobilian teacher creating inconsistencies (Henry Williams) claiming the survivors/founders were never enslaved:

https://www.newspapers.com/image/106707237/?match=1&clipping_id=137175934

Basks in 'Roots' afterglow

5A The Anniston Star Tuesday, Oct. 4, 1977

Cudjoe saga gaining fame

MOBILE, Ala. (AP)—In the afterglow of the season of "Roots," folks are remembering Cudjoe Lewis and the last slave ship to America.

Cudjoe arrived here from Africa in the sweltering hold of that ship, the Clotilde, and his story rolls from that terrible voyage into a saga with a final quiet triumph.

Until recent days, however, it was all but unknown outside of Mobile.

Now national recognition, from a black historians' association, has been visited upon Cudjoe and the infamous Clotilde, joining the efforts of a local teacher, Henry C. Williams, in maintaining Cudjoe's story for posterity.

There's even the spice of a controversy to keep it alive.

It needs no flavoring. Based on two accounts—by Emma Langdon Roche and Zora Neale Hurston, both written in the early 1900s—it is a tale full of drama.

It begins on a day in 1858 when a wealthy captain, Tim Meaher, bet a friend he could bring a cargo of slaves into Mobile despite recent laws that forbid it and federal guards at the port.

The bet, \$100,000 according to one newspaper account, was taken. Meaher sent Capt. Bill Foster and the Clotilde to west Africa in 1859 to win it.

The journey, according to local accounts and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, was the last in which slaves were brought to America.

The Roche and Hurston sto-

ries, both based on lengthy talks with Cudjoe, who died around 1934 in his 90s, differ on the name of the west African village that was sacked. Roche calls the villagers Tarkars; Hurston says the village was Togo.

Both, however, say the tribe was pillaged by a notorious King of Dahomey who had, they said, a house built of skulls.

At this point the accounts parallel:

The villagers were surrounded and surprised by Dahomey's forces, which included fierce women warriors who "overpowered and bound the most stalwart men." All villagers were either killed or captured.

Hurston describes Dahomey as a 300-pound man who had, among other things, "a large square filled with thousands of snakes kept for religious ceremonies."

He sold 130 of the captured villagers to Foster, who, said Cudjoe, "looked and looked and looked. Then he pointed to one and then to another."

Humiliated further by having their clothes stripped away, the hostages were boarded into the hold of the Clotilde. Foster took on only 116, leaving in a hurry when he began to suspect a raid by Dahomey.

At sea, they were in the hold for 13 days before being walked for exercise. After 79 days they

pulled up at a secluded location among islands of Mississippi Sound.

Word was sent to Meaher, and at nightfall the Clotilde slipped into Mobile Bay and, avoiding the main channel, headed up Spanish River. The hostages—how many survived the voyage isn't clear—were transferred to a waiting steamboat and taken to John Dabney's plantation at nearby Mount Vernon.

The Clotilde was set afire in a bayou and, by some reports, its charred hulk was visible in the swampy area as recently as the 1960s.

The hostages, after 11 days of being secluded in swamps to avoid suspicious federal officers, were given clothes. Soon they were split up among the Meaher brothers and Foster, most of them going to the Meaher settlement at what is now Plateau and Magazine Point, a few miles from downtown Mobile.

It is here the current conflict arises. Williams, who as a youth lived with Cudjoe and raised a monument to him in 1959, firmly maintains the Africans were not slaves. He rejects mention of any "slave ship."

Dr. Thomas Knight, an Alabama State University professor and member of the association which paid tribute to Cudjoe this summer, says that perhaps they were "technically not

slaves, but they were economically and in many other ways subservient."

On one point Williams and Knight agree: Cudjoe and his fellow villagers established a unique settlement in what became known as "African town." It was "very rare" for a tribe to have the autonomy which Cudjoe's people found in Mobile, says Knight.

The Africans wanted desperately to go back to their homeland but had no means, according to Roche and Hurston. They remained close-knit, preserving their native language into the 1900s as they gradually accepted Christianity and a new culture.

Williams says that today the native Tarkar language "has disappeared. I doubt if we have a single one who can speak it." But he says there are at least two older persons who are direct descendants from the cargo of the Clotilde.

Meaher's descendants also remain in Mobile, a wealthy family with large land holdings and interests in banking and law.

Back in 1859, Tim Meaher was charged with violating the law against bringing African slaves into America, but by all accounts his prosecution ended without a conviction. Just why isn't clear.

Williams also brings up the topic of "reparations," which he says the family of Tim Mea-

her owe to the descendants of the Clotilde voyage. And Meaher? "He will not talk about it," says Williams.

One historian in Mobile says Williams has "muddied the water" about the Clotilde story. A controversy over whether the actual bell of the Clotilde was recovered recently got so heated that the library stuck away its files with a "Do Not Open" warning on them. But Williams' feeling for the history of the Africans is genuine, and he if no one else has learned to speak the language.

The account by Miss Roche, in which she refers to Cudjoe by his African name Kazoola, was written in 1914 in "Historical Sketches of the South." The city has only one copy.

Miss Hurston, who apparently drew heavily on Miss Roche's story and added new material of her own, published her article in 1927 in the Journal of Negro History. The city has only one copy of it.

Dr. S. H. Hudson, a history professor at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Md., helped coordinate the Cudjoe commemorative for the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. He says the honor for Cudjoe, a plaque placed in a downtown square, was founded largely on Miss Hurston's research.

