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Uprooted: Doorway Gardens and African Plant Cultivation in the Colonial Atlantic World

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Abstract: *Approximately twelve million enslaved African people were uprooted from their homes and sent to the New World to work as free forced labor on plantation fields. Meanwhile, African plants also made their own triangular voyage across the Atlantic as slave ship captains gathered provisions for the seafaring journey or Africans stowed away food as they embarked on an unknown and horrifying journey. While attention on the transatlantic trade nexus often focuses on food and cash crops traveling between Europe and the Americas, several different produce of African origins were transplanted in America and often found in enslaved people's provision gardens. These provision gardens provided enslaved men and women a mild form of independence as they cultivated their own food, often consisting of produce from Africa, and sold the surplus locally to the community. Examining the history of enslaved people's provision gardens is an overlooked but significant aspect of slavery as it adds to the discourse on the Columbian Exchange, enslaved Black culture, and the botanical knowledge of enslaved African men and women.*

SUFFICE not this; to every slave assign
Some mountain-ground: or, if waste broken land
To thee belong, that broken land divide.
This let them cultivate, one day, each week.[1]
\- *The Sugar-Cane (1764)*

Between 1525 and 1866, over twelve million African people were forced onto slave ships to work on plantation fields across the Atlantic. In the following years, hundreds of thousands more New World-born Black people were internally trafficked in the Americas.[2] Most performed hard manual labor in the fields, cultivating food and cash crops for the colonies and their motherlands. The traditional historical narrative of the colonial triangle trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas stresses the importance of certain crops, such as tobacco and sugar from the Americas, while neglecting to consider the ecological impact of others. Moreover, many contemporary scholars recognize that many Europeans intentionally and unintentionally crossed European and American plants over the ocean on their voyages to the New World and back to Europe.[3] Recently, scholars have reconsidered the traditional triangle trade narrative; however, it continues to persist in the popular consciousness and suggests that the abundance of crops and other materials was produced and exchanged between Europe and the Americas while Africa primarily provided exploited gold and commodified humans. This narrative dismisses Africa's contribution to the ecological and botanical trade that occurred in the colonies starting as early as the

[1] James Grainger, "The Sugar-Cane," Digital Grainger: An Online Edition of The Sugar-Cane, 1764, lines 445 - 448, https://digital-grainger.github.io/grainger/texts/full-text.html.
[2] Slave Voyages is the largest public database to date archiving slave and ship records of the transatlantic slave trade. "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Estimates," Slave Voyages, accessed January 3, 2022, https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates?selected_tab=timeline.
[3] Referring to the works of Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism* and *The Columbian Exchange,* later discussed in this work, and the more recent scholarship of Judith Carney and Londa Schiebinger.

sixteenth century. Just as millions of enslaved people were uprooted from their homes in Africa and transplanted to the Americas, African plants also made their own triangular voyage across the Atlantic.

Figure 1. Hortus Cliffortianus Frontispiece by Jan Wandelaar (1690–1759) (left) in Hortus Cliffortianus by Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) published in 1738. On the right is a close-up of the image showing the personification of Africa holding an aloe plant and Asia in Turkish dress carrying a coffee tree. Courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Museum.[4]

Unfortunately, Africa continues to be a "Dark Continent," though not in the way European colonists used the term which was

[4] Jan Wandelaar, *Hortus Cliffortianus Frontispiece,* in *Hortus Cliffortianus* by Carl Linneaus, 1738, accessed January 26, 2022, https://www.doaks.org/resources/online-exhibits/botany-of-empire/subscriptions-dedications-and-patrons/hortus-cliffortianus.

to denote what they perceived as an elusive and untamed landscape.[5] Rather, Africa continues to be relegated to the shadows of world history. Scholarship on Africa resides on the periphery of global history with the presumption that African peoples hardly accomplished anything notable before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1471 or the establishment of the slave trade at the end of the fifteenth century. Recent discourse on African agriculture suggests, however, that Africans accomplished independent domestication of animals and food crops thousands of years before Muslim caravans headed to the Sub-Sahara in the fifth century and before the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century.[6] In reality, though often unrecognized, Africa produces over a hundred species of global food crops, including watermelon, plantains, okra, groundnuts, rice, palm oil, coffee, black-eyed peas, millet, and yams.[7]

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[5] Often referred to as the "Dark Continent" by European colonists, Africa represented many negative tropes in early modern Europe and became a rhetorical ground for the binary depiction between civility and savagery, progress and backwardness, and Europe versus the Other. However, this depiction was only one of several that archeologists Jean and John Comaroff have identified. Other depictions included "Mother Africa," which depicted Africa as a bountiful landscape needing to be cultivated and whose resources could be extracted. Another allegory was the "Noble Savage," and the belief that Christian missionaries' need to save African peoples through religious conversion to bring them closer to civility and modern progress. Comaroff, Jean., and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*: *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa,* Vol 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 87.

[6] Judith Ann Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff*, In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 6.

[7] Carney and Rosomoff, 20-21.

Figure 2. Map showing the natural vegetation of Africa. Courtesy of A North Carolina History Online Resource.[8]

[8] *Natural Vegetation of Africa*, A North Carolina History Online Resource (ANCHOR), accessed April 21, 2022, public domain, https://www.ncpedia.org/media/map/map-africa-showing.

Africa and its peoples are often depicted monolithically when, in actuality, the landscapes are as diverse as the population. Situated in the middle of the Equator, Africa extends beyond both the Tropic of Cancer in the northern hemisphere and the Tropic of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere (*Figure 2*). The changes in latitude manifest a wide range of climates and ecosystems from subtropical Mediterranean zones in the most northern and southern points, vast deserts and grasslands across the Tropic latitudes, and dense rainforests at the Equator. The broad range of climates promotes diverse flora and fauna across the continent, many of which African people learned to cultivate and domesticate over thousands of years. In fact, historical geographer Judith Carney identified over sixty food crops of African origin, such as yams, okra, watermelon, and groundnuts in her 2011 work, *In the Shadow of Slavery*. Moreover, she notes various non-African origin crops were successfully established and nativized in Africa, such as coffee and the plantain, long before the Portuguese landed in present-day Ghana on the West Coast of Africa in 1471.[9]

The cultivation of crops not native to Africa before the arrival of Europeans forces scholars to reckon with the prospect that African people significantly influenced cross-culture world trade before Europeans set sail in the fifteenth century. It also exposes Western hegemony over food production and refutes the fallacy of Africa as a "backward" continent dependent on others for food, previously suggested by environmental historian Alfred Crosby (1931–2018).[10] Historian Philip Curtin expressed this when discussing the general trade that occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa. Though he notes Sub-Saharan Africa was more isolated from Afro-Eurasia commerce due to the vast arid desert, long-distance trade continued to exist. In his work, Curtin challenges the assumption of Africa as progressively dormant:

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[9] Carney and Rosomoff, 20-21.

[10] Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th anniversary edition (Westport, CT: Praeger Publisher, 2003), 185.

> One of the myths of African history is the old view that commerce in Africa was largely pioneered by outsiders who penetrated a stagnant continent… When the European 'explorers' of the nineteenth century *did* [sic] travel from the coast into the interior, they did so with the help and guidance of established African merchants who were already in the business of long-distance trade.[11]

The Anglocentric myth that Europeans initiated trading in Africa strips African people of their long-held history of trade and commercialism.

The belief that Europeans also taught African nations proper agrarian techniques also remains prominent despite the more recent rise of scholarly attention on Africa's agricultural development and botanical influences in the transatlantic nexus. As Curtin argues though, African merchants established routes all across Africa and through the Sahara that eventually connected to roads in Afro-Eurasia several centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese. Among these trade commodities were food and produce items such as dates, manioc, palm oil and wine, watermelon, gourds, wheat, sorghum, and cowpeas.[12]

Native-African crops—carried across knowingly or unknowingly by Europeans, enslaved Africans, or livestock—sailed across the Atlantic and prospered in the new soil of enslaved Africans' provision gardens, Maroon communities, and sometimes in the plantation fields themselves.[13] The need to observe Africa as an element of the intercontinental botanical exchange is dire as it

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[11] Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 15-16.

[12] Curtin, 20; Nehemia Levtzion and Jay Spaulding, *Medieval West Africa: Views from Arab Scholars and Merchants* (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), 7, 11, 31.

[13] A Maroon was a term given to a self-liberated enslaved person of the West Indies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who escaped from slavery and lived in communities found hidden in the jungles and mountains. A Maroon could also be a descendent from a self-liberated enslaved person.

challenges the predominant narrative of Atlantic world crop cultivation. On the plantations, enslaved Africans endured the drudgery of the plantation work regime while also producing a rich culture all their own that is embodied in the food they produced and prepared for themselves. Exploring the movement of the African plant diaspora is to glimpse, through a new lens of understanding, the slave trade, plantation societies, and enslaved people's fortitude and constitution to survive on unknown soil. In addition to analyzing the recent studies on this topic, this research hopes to expand on the current work on enslaved Africans' contributions to the botanical legacy of the New World by taking a closer look at provision gardens and the food they prepared in the greater colonial Caribbean and South America.[14]

Rethinking the Columbian Exchange

Over the course of fifty years, scholars have continued to enhance our understanding of the botanical exchange of the Colonial Era from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century by unearthing the impact of foreign plants and animals once they landed in the Americas. The most significant shift in environmental history and its consideration of nature's impact on human history was Alfred W. Crosby's influential 1972 work, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, succeeded by his other notable work, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900,* published in 1986. Crosby recognized that many European plants and animals were intentionally brought to the New World for cultivation, but he also made the important argument that some aspects were unintentional and also contributed to empire building in the New World. Crosby's sequential work, *Ecological Imperialism*, for instance, elaborated further on the unintentional transfer of diseases, weeds, vermin, and insects from Europe to the Americas, which had

[14] The term "Greater Caribbean" refers to the islands located in what is known as the Caribbean plus tropical parts of South and Central America that border the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean.

detrimental consequences for the landscape and Native peoples of the New World.

Taking an Anglocentric approach, Crosby's work is a bit linear and progressivist in his analysis of Europe's achievement in world hegemony, often ignoring or peripheralizing other regions' contributions to the movement of plants, animals, and pathogens via trade and conquest. Specifically, Crosby neglected to see the impact native African plants had on the New World and how they too were part of the ecological imperialism process. In *The Columbian Exchange*, he expresses his views of Africa's dependency on other nations for food:

> The importance of American food in Africa is more obvious than in any other continent of the Old World, for in no other continent, except the Americas themselves, is so great a proportion of the population so dependent on American foods. Very few of man's cultivated plants originated in Africa… and so Africa has had to import its chief food plants from Asia and America.[15]

Nevertheless, Crosby's seminal work opened a new sector of historical scholarship, and since then, many scholars practice a similar methodology, viewing history from an interdisciplinary geographical and environmental perspective. However, just as enslaved people carved out a new home and culture for themselves amidst the violence and abhorrence brought by enslavement, so too did the plants root themselves in the Americas and Caribbean. Only recently have historians begun to observe the impact of African plants in plantation societies in the Americas.

One of the leading scholars dedicated to rectifying this imbalance is historical geographer Judith Carney, who has written extensively on the botanical exchange and legacy of African food diasporas in the Americas. She is best known for her work on the

[15] Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange,* 185.

development of African rice cultivation in her 2001 work, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Since the publication of the groundbreaking work, she has continued to expand the scant literature on the transatlantic network from an Afrocentric perspective. Assisted by independent researcher Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, Carney's 2009 work, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World*, examined how enslaved Africans contributed to botanical knowledge, as well as the exchange of flora and fauna, and agrarian practices in the Atlantic world. Criticizing *The Columbian Exchange* and the scholarship that followed, she recognized that research often focuses on the interaction and exchange of Amerindian and European crops and "unintentionally occludes the African components of intercontinental crop exchanges and the role of Africans in pioneering them elsewhere."[16] Her many books and articles directly address this silence in the literature and have been influential for this specific piece of research.

In *Black Rice*, Carney examines the cultivation of two of the most widely produced rice species, red-hue rice from Africa, *Oryza glaberrima*, and the more durable white rice from Asia, *Oryza sativa*, that generated the highest yields of exported crops in South Carolina in the eighteenth century.[17] In addition to yams and sugarcane, rice became one of the first crops in the sixteenth century to journey across the Atlantic. Carney contends that only through the technological and agricultural knowledge of West Africans was rice able to thrive in the Americas. According to Carney, the need to adapt rice to the New World:

> Required the presence of human beings already familiar with rice culture, the knowledge to grow the crop in wetland environments and the means to mill the rice once it had been harvested. The only people in South Carolina possessing this familiarity

[16] Carney and Rosomoff, 121.
[17] Judith Ann Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 38.

> were Carolina slaves who originated in the rice region of West Africa."[18]

Her other inspirational work, *In the Shadow of Slavery,* extends beyond rice cultivation to explore how other African-derived plants and animals came to be in the Americas. Rice and other African native produce symbolized some degree of agency whether it grew in the plantation fields, provision gardens, or in Maroon settlements scattered across the Americas and Caribbean.

Contributing to agricultural history, *Black Rice* and *In the Shadow of Slavery* expand the literature regarding the Columbian Exchange by provincializing Western-derived agricultural knowledge and their singular movement of crops and seeds across the Atlantic. Both represent a vital expansion of the literature of the Columbian Exchange, which, following Crosby's influential book published in 1972, examines the range of environmental transformations wrought by the movement of biological organisms (germs, seeds, livestock) back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean beginning in the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, this literature tends to privilege Western-derived knowledge of the movement of individual seeds across the Atlantic and is more concerned with the plantation crops that created boom economies than with the subsistence crops that sustained generations of displaced and enslaved Africans. Nevertheless, Carney's work vitally diverts attention from well-studied cash crops and the economics of the Columbian Exchange that profited plantation owners and redirects that attention to the humbler staple crops that sustained generations of enslaved people.

What became known as the "black rice thesis," however, did not go without challenge by historians studying the colonial Atlantic world. Together, Atlantic historians David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson argue that while enslaved Africans worked in the fields producing rice, it was not only enslaved

[18] Carney, *Black Rice*, 81.

people who accounted for the success of rice cultivation. They propose rice cultivation succeeded due to a myriad of factors:

> There is no doubt that African slaves were the primary cultivators of rice and that some introduced Old World customs of sowing, threshing, and winnowing the crop into the New World. However, there is no compelling evidence that African slaves transferred whole agricultural systems to the New World; nor were they the primary players in creating and maintaining rice regimes in the Americas.[19]

At the heart of their argument, plantation owners and businessmen also helped establish a rice-growing empire in South Carolina. While not suggesting a return to the traditional narrative that grossly exaggerates European agricultural and cultural knowledge, they argue for the necessity to examine evidence consistently and "employ sophisticated models of cultural migration."[20] Specifically, they openly object to the "black rice" thesis by dismissing the oral story of a female captive hiding rice in her hair while boarding a slave ship, stating the story was all that was needed to propel the hypothesis forward.[21] Few oral stories exist of Black women playing a central role in the procurement of rice in the Americas and Maroon societies.[22] Rejecting these oral stories is

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[19] David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, "Problems with the 'Black Rice' Thesis," *The Atlantic Slave Trade Problems in World History*, edited by David Northrup (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011), 129.
[20] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, 126.
[21] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, 131.
[22] One Maroon oral history told in French Guiana as well as Maranhao and Para in Brazil tells of an unknown enslaved African woman who hid rice in her and her children's hair as they were sent aboard slave ships. When a plantation owner purchased one of the children, he ran his hands through the children's hair and found the seeds. When he demanded what the seeds were, the child responded that the rice seeds were from Africa. Another Maroon oral story is of the self-liberated woman named Paanza from Suriname who also hid rice in her

problematic as they are the only accounts of their own history, continued through generations by enslaved Africans and their descendants. Historians of subaltern studies understand all too well that colonialism relinquished the subaltern from global history and that relying solely on written texts by European colonists perpetuates these narratives while silencing other histories.[23]

Inspired by Carney's and Rosomoff's, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, Londa Schiebinger adopts a similar framework and methodological approach to argue for Africa's contribution to the science of botanical and herbal medicine in *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plants, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-century Atlantic World*. Throughout the book, published in 2017, Schiebinger discusses three nexuses of the history of medicine: first, the well-known colonial relationship between Europe and the Americas; second, the slave nexus connecting Africa and the Americas; and lastly, the conquest nexus that shifted Amerindian medicinal knowledge and practices to the plantation complex. Using Carney's and Rosomoff's research regarding the Africanization of Caribbean food systems, Schiebinger expands this framework to encompass medicinal herbs and plants and suggests that "seeds could be carried in the holds of ships and also in hair, fur, or soils. Enslaved Africans may have cultivated these familiar plants in their kitchen gardens."[24] She also hypothesizes that a combination

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hair before fleeing slavery. Paanza is found in colonial historical records and was born in 1705 in Suriname. She escaped her enslavement between 1730 and 1740, and joined a Maroon community known as the Saramaka. Carney and Rosomoff, 76, 92-93.

[23] Rosalind C. Morris, and Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[24] Africanization refers to the modification of geography, cultural, political and social structures to reflect African identity, practices, and culture. The Africanization of Caribbean food refers to Africans' contribution to the Creolization process, or the cultural fusion and hybridization of European (mostly British, French, and Spanish), Native, and African diasporas in the Caribbean, in regard to the culinary arts and food production. Londa L. Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plants, and Medicine in the*

of botanical and medicinal knowledge from Amerindians, Africans, and Europeans created a crucible of herbal medicine in the Caribbean.

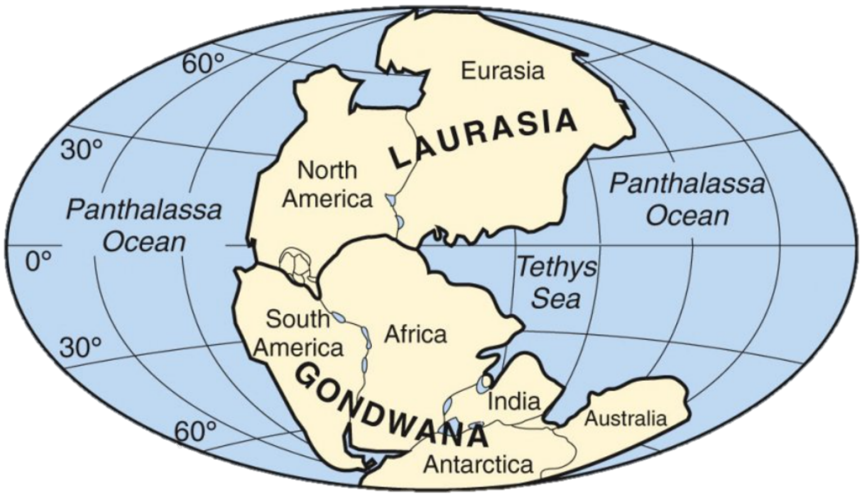

Figure 3. The supercontinent of Pangea 200 million years ago. Courtesy of PNGHut.[25]

Similar to Crosby, Schiebinger also suggests that the splitting of the supercontinent Pangea 200 million years ago may have contributed to enslaved Africans' understanding of South American plants since similar plant species also existed in Africa. Crosby broadly took into account Pangaea and its geographical factors as influencers of human development while Schiebinger more narrowly applied this to her study on Africans' botanical knowledge. Schiebinger suggests that plant species previously found on West Gondwana (the southern part of Pangea) evolved individually after the splitting of the present-day continents of

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Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 46.

[25] *The Supercontinent of Pangea 200 Million Years Ago*, PNGHut, accessed April 21, 2022, public domain, https://pnghut.com/png/Ls0MgNWzGw/panthalassa-laurasia-pangaea-gondwana-tethys-ocean-continent-earth-transparent-png.

Africa and South America and that enslaved Africans found substitution plants similar to those found in West Africa (*Figure 3*).[26] According to Schiebinger, "both West Africa and the greater Caribbean are tropical, and some eighty-five floral families are common to both."[27] Overall, *Secret Cures of Slaves* is another necessary addition to scholarly literature that breaks away from the traditional colonial trade narrative to examine how enslaved Africans contributed to modern medicine through the transfer of African plants, adaptation to New World flora, and their understanding of botanically-derived medicine.

Discussions about the transfer of plants across the Atlantic naturally suggest a study of the culinary history of the Americas. Historians have also shown interest in the transfer of African-native food crops and the development of American and Creole food. A perspective on the African diaspora and the origin of American cuisine beginning with slavery is the focus of culinary historian Jessica B. Harris' 2012 book, *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*, which inspired the recently released Netflix historical documentary series in 2021. Closing an essential gap in culinary history, Harris discusses the culture, history, and identity of African Americans through the development of American cuisine. In an interview, she expresses:

> Black hands have always been there. Africa is in so much American food that we do not really think about it. We are foundational to the cooking of this country [America]. If you look at the role we occupied through enslavement, we are growing the food, we are processing the food, we are preparing the food, we are serving the food.[28]

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[26] Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves*, 61.
[27] Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves*, 61.
[28] Netflix, "'High on the Hog,' Dr. Jessica B. Harris Interview, Netflix," *Youtube*, June 4, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RbVMgh-d90.

Beginning in West Africa and continuing through colonial enslavement into modern-day, Harris traces the history of African American and Black food cultivation from yams, rice, and okra to the culinary development of American "soul" cuisine. Though her work focuses specifically on America, she provides a basis for understanding how enslaved people from the Americas influenced cuisine culture throughout the entire New World.

Only in the past few decades, since the early 1970s, have scholars turned their attention to environmental history and the influence of plants on human development. As historians continue to reflect on the importance of flora, there have been strides to create a more inclusive picture of the role of botanicals from a global and less Anglocentric perspective. No longer is the focus solely on the trade nexus between European and American flora and the development of cash crops. Scholarship now includes the cultivation of African plants in the New World, which spurred an entire culture and identity for those who were enslaved. Rooted in provision gardens and mountain grounds, enslaved men and women gained some authority over the crops they grew in their gardens, the food they ate, and the herbal medicines they used.

Provision Gardens of the Enslaved

To supplement the minimal provisions granted by their enslavers, if any were given at all, most enslaved Africans cultivated their own food on small plots of land for communal consumption just outside the plantation fields. Land deemed unsuitable for commodity production on the plantation estates was often set aside by owners for enslaved Africans; they themselves were responsible for growing their own food and often providing their own medical care. These gardens, found on the periphery of the plantations, provided enslaved men and women with some minimal control over their lives by giving them more choices over what they grew for food or used for medical treatment. Carney contends that provision gardens, or as she calls them, the "botanical gardens of the dispossessed," provided the enslaved with some autonomy

within the plantation system.[29] It is here that African and New World "seed and root crops, fruit trees, and medicinal plants were interplanted."[30] The gardens could also provide further liberation either by allowing enslaved people to sell surplus food at "slave-run markets" or for self-liberated enslaved people (known as Maroons) to carry food, root cuttings, and seeds to the new areas they settled in the mountains.

Both enslaved women and men tended to these provision gardens either at nightfall after completing their daily work or during a day of rest (if their enslaver allowed it), which was usually a Saturday or Sunday.[31] Scottish slavery abolitionist and statistician Zachary Macaulay (1768–1838) wrote that subsistence plots were the only means by which enslaved people received provision in Jamaica, stating, "if, therefore, they neglected to employ in their provision-grounds a sufficient portion of the Sunday, to secure to them an adequate supply of food, they might be reduced to absolute want."[32] Similarly, in the 1740s, St. Thomas plantation owner Johan L. Carstens (1705–1745) documented how "slaves receive nothing from their master in the way of food or clothing, expect only the small plot of land at the outermost extremity of his plantation land that he assigns to each slave."[33]

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[29] For more information on provision gardens and subsistence plots, see *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 123. Judith Carney, "Subsistence in the Plantationocene: Dooryard Gardens, Agrobiodiversity, and the Subaltern Economies of Slavery," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48, no. 5 (2021), 1080.

[30] Carney, "Subsistence in the Plantationocene," 1080.

[31] In his account of Suriname in 1660, George Warren (n.d.) wrote that slaves worked until Saturday afternoon and then were able to tend to their own gardens. In the 1700s, Charles-Francois Blondel de Jouvancour (n.d.) stated that some plantation owners allow their slaves to care for their gardens on Saturday. Carney and Rosomoff, 100, 109.

[32] Zachary Macaulay, *Negro Slavery, or, A View of Some of the More Prominent Features of That State of Society: As It Exists in the United States of America and in the Colonies of the West Indies, Especially in Jamaica* (London: Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, 1824), 39.

[33] J.L. Carstens, quoted *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 109.

Provision gardens provide critical insight into the lived experiences of the enslaved and contribute to the botanical narrative of the Caribbean and the New World. Moreover, these gardens actively represent alternative food systems to that of the Western monoculture plantation.[34] They were commonly polyculture in design, containing various crops planted together in a complementary ecosystem, compared to the European monoculture practice that grew only a few single crops in expansive flat spaces.

Not all provision gardens were alike and some scholars contend there were at least three distinct types of land: common-ground, mountain-grounds, and doorway (or yardhouse) gardens.[35] Unlike the doorway gardens or ravine lands, common grounds reiterated Western approaches to agriculture and used European farming techniques. These grounds were part of the plantation farming acres, often flat and deforested, with designated rectangular spots to grow one or two specific types of crops. Some local legislation required by law to allocate common ground to the cultivation of provision fruits and vegetables. Often dependent on the amount of marginal or less fertile land, islands like St. Kitts and Nevis provided larger gardens than those in Antigua or Barbados. In 1798, colonial British legislation in St. Kitts and Nevis required plantation owners to allot a mere forty square feet per household. Many areas, however, granted one acre to every ten enslaved people, though laws allowed plantation owners to reduce other rations by half if they provided more than the required amount of provision land.[36]

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[34] Carney, "Subsistence in the Plantationocene," 1079.
[35] Lydia Mihelic Pulsipher, "They Have Saturdays and Sundays to Feed Themselves," *Expedition Magazine* 32.2 (1990), http://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/?p=3207.
[36] B. W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (The Press University of the West Indies, 1995), 207-208.

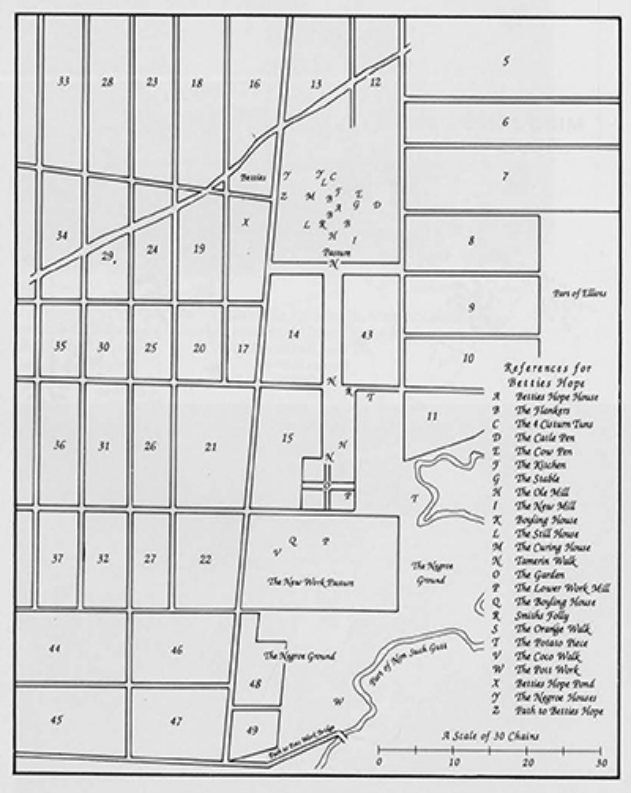

Figure 4. A portion of a map outlining the Betty's Hope estate in Antigua in 1710. Courtesy of PennMuseum. [37]

Rarely were these crops of European origin, and instead were African or New World crops such as cassava, sweet pota-toes, bananas, and plantains. Over the decades, common grounds declined as enslaved Africans began to cultivate their own food near their quarters or by nearby grounds, and they completely disappeared after the abolishment of slavery and the Plantationoscene era (1700–1860) collapsed.[38] At the Betty's Hope plantation in Antigua, a map dated 1710 shows specific areas of

[37] *Betty's Hope Estate Map* in Pulsipher, "They Have Saturdays and Sundays to Feed Themselves," http://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/?p=3207.
[38] Pulsipher, "They Have Saturdays and Sundays to Feed Themselves."

the plantation allocated for the systematic production of provisions under the title "negro ground" (*Figure 4*). These common grounds in the lower right corner are far from the "negro houses" that occupied the northern side of the plantation next to the Betty's Hope mansion. It is possible additional food grew near the housing quarters of the enslaved in the form of yard-house gardens, which was a common practice as it provided additional space to cultivate more food.[39]

It is most likely on these common provision grounds that European naturalists and colonial plantation owners searched for "green gold," or fruits and vegetables that could be produced on a mass scale as profitable cash crops.[40] In 1794, physician and naturalist Henry Barham (c. 1670–1726) published *Hortus Americanus*, a botanical biomedical journal containing his observation of dozens of plants and vegetables produced in the Caribbean and tropical South America. Focusing primarily on Jamaican flora, he documents various plants found on the island and notes if they possess any culinary or medicinal value. In a few instances, he expresses his newfound awareness of these plants by finding them in provision gardens. Describing the groundnut, he writes:

> The first I ever saw of these growing was in a negro's plantation, who affirmed, that they are in great plenty on their country; and they now grow very well in Jamaica. Some call them gub-a-gubs; and others ground-nuts, because the nut of them, or fruit that is to be eaten, grows in the ground… masters of ships often feed negroes with them all

[39] Pulsipher, "They Have Saturdays and Sundays to Feed Themselves."
[40] Londa L. Schiebinger, "Prospecting for Drugs: European Naturalists in the West Indies," in *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World*, ed. Londa L. Schiebinger, and Claudia Swan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 119.

> their voyage…They may be eaten raw, roasted, or boiled.[41]

This excerpt provides three crucial insights. First, there is the acknowledgment that groundnuts are native to Africa and were transferred across the Atlantic, illustrating Africa's contribution to the botanical exchange occurring in the colonial New World. It also provides much-needed documentation about the lived experiences of enslaved men and women and the food they cultivated and prepared for themselves to survive. Lastly, ship captains intentionally purchased groundnuts on the West African coast as provisions for their voyage across the Atlantic.

Barham also provides another account of how he found a new plant, which he calls Oily Pulse, in a provision garden. However, it is unclear if he is referring to a specific pulse such as chickpeas or cowpeas, or another type of lentil altogether:

> [Oily Pulse] which is called zefamum, or Jefamum Africanum. The first time I saw this plant, it was growing in a negro's plantation, who told me, the ground the seed between two stones, and eat it as they do corn… The oil that is drawn from it is called cergulim oil. The seed is often mixed and ground with coco, to make chocolate. In Ethiopia and Egypt, they use the oil as we do oil-olive… A decoction of the plant is good for coughs, pleurifies, inflammations of the lungs, hard schirrous [sic.] tumours, and women use it for hardness of the womb.[42]

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[41] Henry Barham, *Hortus Americanus: Containing an Account of the Trees, Shrubs, and Other Vegetable Productions, of South-America and the West-India Islands, and Particularly of the Island of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Alexander Aikman, 1794), 145, www.biodiversitylibrary.org.
[42] Barham, 121-122.

Barham further mentions the plant's use as a poultice for tumors and a stool softener. Though there is no evidence on exactly who told Barham about the plant, besides the high probability that it was presented by an enslaved person, its scientific name, *Jefamum africanum,* indicates the plant grows natively in Africa or was at least assumed so by naturalists. Oily Pulse was one of those plants possibly transferred from Africa to the New World in provision gardens and used by enslaved people for both nourishment and medicine.

Mountain grounds were an additional means for enslaved men and women to cultivate their own food. In the eighteenth century, plantation owners allowed enslaved Africans to cultivate on "remote upland zones" away from the plantation but still within a short distance.[43] The sloped and rocky soil required agricultural techniques not used in Western agrarian practices such as erosion control methods. However, the sloping provided naturally made rows for planting while also playing a crucial role in watering and protecting sprouts from sun and wind. During his time in Jamaica, travel writer William Beckford (1760–1844) wrote of these mountain grounds stating, "[the enslaved] generally make choice of such spots of land for their grounds as are encompassed by lofty mountains; and I think that they commonly prefer the sides of hills."[44] He also notes the usefulness of the cultivation techniques claiming "all kinds of provisions and corn are, as well as the plantain, successfully cultivated in the mountains; but as this is done by the negroes in their own rounds, and on those days which are given to them for this particular purpose."[45] Women were often in charge of tending to the provision gardens, at least according to Beckford's accounts. At one point in his work, he comments that "the women, to plant provisions upon the estates (their grounds in

[43] Pulsipher, "They Have Saturdays and Sundays to Feed Themselves."
[44] William Beckford, *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica* (London: Printed for T. and J. Egerton, 1790), 151.
[45] Beckford, 129.

the mountains having been previously attended to)" for the rest of the day.[46]

The question of provision gardens was not only a matter of economics and sustainability for the enslaved but also one that took up social discourse among Europeans and colonists regarding the commodification of human beings. This can best be seen in the poem of Scottish physician and poet James Grainger (1721–1766), *The Sugar-Cane*, published in London in 1764. *The Sugar-Cane* witnessed immediate success and underwent several reprints throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Organized over the course of four books, Grainger describes the Caribbean geography, natural disasters, the sugar-production process, and slavery. In the last book, he recounts his understanding of enslaved African culture found on the sugar plantations. He argues favorably for the enslavement of Africans but also implores plantation owners to provide those they enslaved with more provision grounds in hopes of increasing worker productivity:

> SUFFICE not this; to every slave assign
> Some mountain-ground: or, if waste broken land
> To thee belong, that broken land divide.
> This let them cultivate, one day, each week;
> And there raise yams, and there cassada's root:
> From a good daemon's staff cassada sprang,
> Tradition says, and Caribbees believe;
> Which into three the white-rob'd genius broke,
> And bade them plant, their hunger to repel.
> There let angola's bloomy bush supply
> For many a year, with wholesome pulse their board.
> There let the bonavist, his fringed pods
> Throw liberal o'er the prop; while ochra bears
> Aloft his slimy pulp, and help disdains.
> There let potatos [sic.] mantle o'er the ground;

[46] Beckford, 140.

Sweet as the cane-juice is the root they bear.[47]

In the poem, he asks plantation owners to let enslaved men and women use "broken land" and "mountain-ground," unsuitable for Western agricultural practices for them to grow their own food. He then tells plantation owners to let them have one day a week to tend to their own garden to "repel" their hunger. There are a total of six crops mentioned in the stanzas (yams, cassava, angola, ochra, bonavist, and potatoes), providing some evidence as to what exactly grew in these mountain-ground gardens.

Enslaved Africans also utilized the land around their quarters to grow additional crops, known as doorway or yard-house gardens. Accounts of doorway gardens are vast, as are their portrayal in sketches and paintings. In 1830, Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–1858) created *Slave Houses, Brazil, 1830s* providing a visual record of the life enslaved people lived in Brazil (*Figure 5*). The image shows a group of enslaved men, women, and children outside of a palm-thatched hut performing various activities while a White woman observes from the balcony of the estate house. Surrounding the hut are several fruit trees; three plantains grow next to the house, two other fruit trees, and a row of pineapple bushes. Chickens are also seen running around the area indicating they provided eggs and meat. Sketches like this one often romanticized the humbled quarters where enslaved Africans survived, ignoring the harsh reality of survival by depicting a simple and quiet agrarian lifestyle surrounded by a surplus of bountiful vegetables and exotic fruits.

[47] Grainger, "The Sugar-Cane," lines 445-460.

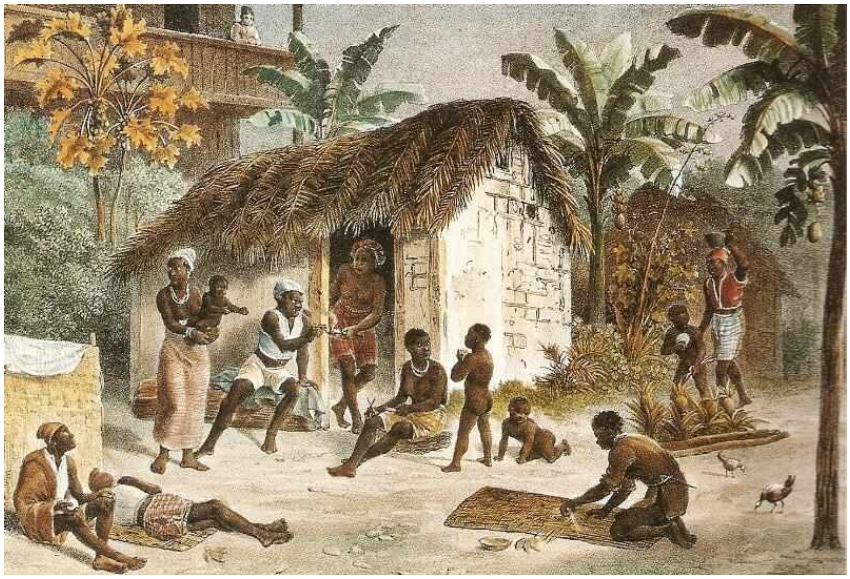

Figure 5. Slave Houses, Brazil, 1830s by Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802–1858). The image portrays an enslaved Black community engaging in various activities from weaving rugs, gathering food, caring for children, and smoking. Several trees and produce grow around the buildings. Courtesy of Children in History.[48]

Nevertheless, doorway gardens continued to be invaluable spaces of subaltern sovereignty. Doorway gardens occupied smaller spaces than common grounds and mountain grounds. Due to their smaller size, maintaining the fertility of the soil was important to maximize crop cultivation. Maintaining the ground required slightly different farming techniques, such as crop rotation rather than full plot rotation to ensure soil nutrients did not deplete. Coconut and plantain palms were popular since they provided food, protection from the sun, and leaves that could be woven into various household items. They also included plants not often produced on a mass scale but still of daily importance, such as herbs, medicinal plants, leafy greens, tubers, cosmetic plants,

[48] Johann Moritz Rugenda, *Slave Houses, Brazil, 1830s*, c. 1830, Slavery in Brazil: Economic Sectors, https://www.histclo.com/act/work/slave/am/cou/bra/sabs-sect.html.

and cactus.[49] Doorway gardens and mountain gardens symbolized some form of independence for the enslaved, unlike common grounds, whose crops were often determined by the plantation owner. With provisions from plantation owners unreliable, these gardens came to represent some form of autonomy as men and women gained food security and could, in some way, choose what to consume to nourish their bodies since enslavers provided little to no rations.

Power to Harm and to Heal

Autonomy over the provision grounds generated paranoia among plantation owners. On the one hand, allowing enslaved men and women to tend to their own gardens removed the responsibility to feed and provide for people from plantation owners while also increasing the probability of finding new potentially-commercial produce. On the other hand, general anxiety manifested over what kind of plants could be grown in the garden, from the edible and medicinal to the poisonous. Concerns over Africans' plant knowledge and the possibility of being poisoned by enslaved Africans caused genuine concern among enslavers who feared liberation rebellions. While plantation owners placed caution on all enslaved people, women and Obeah practitioners were seen as the most suspicious.[50] Reverend William James Gardner (1825–1874) noted in his work, *A History of Jamaica,* that Obeah practitioners

[49] According to Lydia Mihelic Pulsipher, aloe vera and lemon grass were just two different plants used for medicinal purposes. Cactus provided nourishment while prickly pear cactus specifically could be utilized as a shampoo. Pulsipher, "They Have Saturdays and Sundays to Feed Themselves."

[50] Obeah has historically been referred to as African witchcraft that developed in the Caribbean, South America, Central America, and the lower parts of the United States. In a process to decolonize the term, Obeah is now defined as a spiritual healing and justice-making practice system that combines physical healing along with spiritual healing.

were "well versed in all the vegetable poisons of the island, and sometimes had them planted in his garden."[51]

In the eyes of the enslavers, women tending to the needs of the plantation manor, especially as cooks, possessed a more likely threat of poisoning White families with the food the women cooked and served. The stereotypical "mammy figure," a racist depiction of an old heavy-set Black woman performing most domestic work, caused the most alarm. Her cooking over a large pot while also being a go-to for medical needs harked back to the European depiction of witches. For example, Barham wrote about the case of an enslaved woman poisoning her enslaver with a plant known as the "Savana Flower":

> A practitioner of physic was poisoned with this plant [Savana Flower] by his negro woman, who had so ordered it that it did not dispatch him quickly, but he was seized with violent gripings, inclining to vomit, and loss of appetite; afterwards he has small convulsions… The whole plant is full of milk, it is always green, and no creature will meddle with it.[52]

Whether this story is true or not, the account illustrates the enslavers' real or imagined fear of being poisoned. For some colonists, the concern over the "Savana Flower" and other poisonous plants grown in doorway gardens or the mountains was a real threat in their minds.

A staple food known to grow in provision gardens was Cassava, a root vegetable, that requires careful preparation before serving. The fear over the plant can be seen in written accounts that caution about the poisonous properties of the plant if prepared incorrectly for consumption due to its high levels of cyanide.

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[51] William James Gardner, *A history of Jamaica from its discovery by Christopher Columbus to the present time* (London : Elliot Stock, 1873), 190, https://archive.org/details/ahistoryjamaica01gardgoog/page/n6/mode/2up.
[52] Barham, 168.

Native to the Caribbean and tropical Americas, enslaved Africans most likely learned how to cook Cassava from Indigenous people.[53] Barham's account bolsters this idea as he discusses the Cassava as both a plant that can be used to nourish and harm the body:

> The expressed juice of the root is very sweet to the palate, but soon purifies and breeds worms, called topuea, which are a violent poison, and which Indians too well know the use of: They dry these worms or maggots, and powder them which powder, in a little quantity, they put under their thumb-nail, and after they drink to those they intend to poison, they put their thumb upon the bowl, and so cunningly convey the poison, wherefore when we see a negro with a long thumb-nail, he is to be mistrusted.[54]

Naturalists and botanist Maria Riddell (1772–1808) also mentions the Cassava root in her book, *Voyages to the Madeira and Leeward Caribbean Isles: With Sketches of the Natural History of these Islands,* published in 1792. Though her description is different from Barham's in that there is no mention of worms, she also notes how enslaved Africans use the plant for food and the dangers of the root. In her journal she writes, "the root is a deadly poison; yet, when the milky liquor it contains is expressed from it, it is converted into a bread called cassava; The Negroes make it their chief diet, and prepare it themselves."[55] The raw consumption of Cassava can cause vertigo, vomiting, and death within one to four hours due to its high toxicity levels of cyanide, but with proper

[53] Carney and Rosomoff, 107-108.
[54] Barham, 34.
[55] Maria Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805* (Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica, 1907), 93.

preparation, the root provides starchy nutrients.[56] The fact that such a plant grew commonly in provision gardens undoubtedly caused fear among plantation owners who were anxious about being poisoned by those seeking liberation and revenge for their enslaved status.

Several native New World and African plants have been documented as poisonous or containing toxic properties. Another common plant was the poppy, still known and used today for its medical and drug use. In her botanical book, *Illustrations of the Natural orders of Plants,* published between 1849 and 1855, Elizabeth Twining (1805–1889) described the poppy known as *Argemone mexicana* as the "common weed of the West Indies" as it could be found growing in the wild and on cultivated land.[57] Barham notes the same poppy stating, "we have a plant that grows like the English common prickly thistle, but its flower is yellow in the shape of the field poppy."[58] In his description of the plant, he tells the story of an unnamed old enslaved man, deemed an "obeah practitioner," who "bewitched" a fellow enslaved man by having him smoke the poppy.[59] Later, Barham notes he saw a bull drop dead in the field and foam at the mouth. After an autopsy, Barham "found several handfuls" of the poppy plant that killed him.[60] The abundance of the poppy meant that enslaved Africans could easily find the flower, but in the colonists' imagination, the plant's association as a drug or poison meant that enslaved peoples had the potential to use the plant as a form of revenge.

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[56] "Chapter 7: Toxic Substances and Antinutritional Factors," in *Roots, Tubers, Plantains, and Bananas in Human Nutrition,* Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States, 1990, https://www.fao.org/3/t0207e/T0207E08.htm#Cassava%20toxicity.

[57] Elizabeth Twining, *Illustrations of the Natural Orders of Plants*,Vol 1 (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), 57, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=chi.102751909&view=1up&seq=57&skin=2021&q1=West%20Indies.

[58] Barham, 151.

[59] Barham, 152.

[60] Barham, 152.

Despite the fear of poisoning and African witchcraft, colonists continued to glean information about plant and ethnobotanical medicine from enslaved people. African usage of plants as medicine differed significantly from colonialists and plantation owners who resorted to traditional Western practices.[61] With the Caribbean establishing itself as a place of medical experimentation, Western practitioners struggled to find cures for unfamiliar "tropical diseases" and sought rigorously for tropical medicines needed to keep colonists and enslaved laborers alive. Unlike in Europe, where medical experimentalists were frequently professors writing in medical journals, medical experimentalists in the Caribbean were primarily independent physicians traveling from plantation to plantation aiming to secure a private practice.[62] The introduction of unfamiliar diseases, such as Yaws or Yellow Fever, added to the lack of medical infrastructures, such as teaching hospitals and medical journals, in the early colonial period, required physicians to learn on the job and be innovative in their techniques.[63]

As Amerindian populations decreased, non-Western medicine became unexpectedly crucial as Africans were more familiar with tropical diseases than European colonists. Colonial physicians adopted African cures due to their effectiveness.[64] European colonial physicians eagerly turned to them for medicinal practices, often taking credit for the so-called discovery in their works, such as Barham who notes the medical use of the Oily Pulse, which he first came to discover in a provision garden.[65] African herbal medicine relied on fresh herbs and plants, unlike Western treatments that used dried herbs or other forms of supposed healing such as bloodletting. Enslaved women's and

[61] Carney, "African Traditional Plant Knowledge in the Circum-Caribbean Region," 171.
[62] Schiebinger, 21-20.
[63] Jamaica only began publishing medical journals in 1830. Schiebinger, 21-20.
[64] Schiebinger, 5, 24.
[65] Barham, 121-122.

men's use of bush baths or teas using fresh herbs as medicine were undoubtedly a tradition coming from the African diaspora.[66]

Enslaved Africans grew various crops on provision gardens in plantations and the mountains of the tropical islands. Most, if not all, of these plants provided substance to enslaved communities, but many colonists were wary of enslaved Africans' botanical knowledge. While European naturalists and botanists scientifically documented different plants of African origin found in provision gardens, a general fear also spread among colonists about being poisoned by unknown plants by those they enslaved. Cases of enslaved men and women poisoning those who enslaved them do exist, but the extent to which these events happened is more likely a result of colonists' imagined fear than actual cases. Overall, the plants growing in the provision garden provided enslaved Africans with nourishment, and they used what they produced to create meals for everyone in the community. Those who found themselves with some surplus could often sell what they cultivated at local markets.

From the Market to the Table

In the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, enslaved people had the opportunity to sell any surplus crops grown in provision gardens at the "slave-run markets," not to be confused with the selling of humans at market auctions, but at markets where enslaved people gathered to trade, buy, and sell food and other goods. These markets existed with the approval of most enslavers and were places where enslaved and free Black men and women could mingle and escape from the drudgery of everyday life. They often took place on a Sunday or Saturday when enslaved laborers were given time to tend to their own provisions. These markets contained food more suited to African tastes found growing in provision gardens such as okra, watermelon, yams,

[66] Carney, "African Traditional Plant Knowledge in the Circum-Caribbean Region," 171.

plantains, and leafy greens. In addition to selling surplus, some also sold and bartered goods like woven rugs and brooms.[67]

Culinary historian Jessica Harris discusses the importance of these markets in the southern United States during the enslavement and highlights the well-known market run by enslaved African Americans in Alexandria, Virginia. It is at these markets, Harris argues, enslaved people could give "a few coins to pay for additional food or a bit of tobacco…it was also a place where folks could smile and court and even listen to music if someone brought a fiddle."[68] These independently run markets could be found scattered across the Americas and Caribbean. For some Caribbean islands, the revenue generated from these markets generated up to twenty percent of the local economy.[69] Though seldom, enslaved men and women who earned enough money at the markets used the money to purchase their freedom.[70] The sketch, *Negroes Sunday-Market at Antigua,* by Gaetano Testolini (1793–1822) provides a visual depiction of one of these markets (*Figure 6*). Created in 1806, the image depicts free White and Black people browsing through the goods offered by the enslaved laborers sitting on the ground as they display eggs, chickens, gourds, and melons.

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[67] Harris, 84.
[68] Harris, 85.
[69] "*Negroes Sunday-Market Antigua* Description," Royal Museum Greenwich, accessed January 26, 2022, https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-254729.
[70] "Negroes Sunday-Market Antigua," Royal Museum Greenwich, accessed January 26, 2022, https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-254729.

Figure 6. Negroes Sunday-Market at Antigua by Gaetano Testolini created in 1806. Courtesy of The Royal Museum Greenwich.[71]

The Governess of Jamaica's, Lady Maria Nugent (1771–1834, r. 1801–1806), personal journal provides detailed accounts of the markets operated by enslaved Africans and the foods they ate while she resided at the Governor's estate in Jamaica. In her first mention of attending one of these markets, she writes that the market held "innumerable parties of negroes, laughing, dancing, and signing, and dressing their food on the roadside, and all hurrying to get to Kingston for alas! Sunday is the great market day. It is a sad custom, but I fear difficult to reform or alter in any way."[72] She does not detail why she is saddened or disproves of

[71] Gaetano Testolino, *Negroes Sunday-Market at Antigua,* 1806, accessed January 26, 2022, provided by The Royal Museum Greenwich, Image in the public domain, https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-254729.
[72] Nugent, 89.

the marketplace, but some enslavers opposed enslaved men and women from gathering in numbers in fear of revolts.[73] Lady Nugent's later accounts discuss the market in even further detail:

> Leave Arcadia about twelve, and arrived at Falmouth to dinner. The streets crowed with people, and a negro market held in front of General Bell's house. The negroes seemed very happy, selling their yams, cocoa-nuts, plantains, &c. And salt fish. When we showed ourselves in the piazza, they laughed, danced, bowed, curtsied, and grinned, and used every possible grimace to express their happiness in seeing us. I took a fancy to an immense water-melon, which my maid secured for me, and I devoured it all, while I was dressing for dinner.[74]

While she appears to romanticize the event with enslaved people happily serving her, the account provides a great deal of insight into the role these markets had in the lives of both colonialists and those bound in servitude. First, she expresses her joy over finding a watermelon and mentions various other foods often found in the provision gardens of the enslaved rather than on the plantation fields themselves, which were often given to cash crops like sugar and tobacco. Second, she makes note of the enslaved people enjoying their time away from the fields by dancing and laughing

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[73] Approximately forty years prior to Lady Nugent's arrival, the infamous Tacky's Rebellion or Tacky's War of 1760 in Jamaica was the largest slavery liberation revolt on record till the Haitian Revolution led by Toussaint Louverture from 1791 to 1804. Lady Nugent expresses her husband's concerns over Louverture frequently throughout the text. Passed that same year as the Tacky Rebellion, Jamaican colonists drew up "An Act to Remedy the Evils arising from Irregular Assemblies of Slaves." The law forbade the practice of Obeah and also attacked enslaved people's movements by restricting gatherings and preventing those with the status of "slave" from leaving plantations without consent.

[74] Nugent, 187.

with each other. Lastly, she remarks on how her maid obtained the watermelon for her even though it is unclear whether the transaction was bought or bartered. Regardless of whether it was bought or traded, Lady Nugent's documented account shows enslaved men and women gaining some moment of autonomy by generating some wealth or goods for themselves rather than for their enslavers.

All food eventually found its way into the kitchen and onto the table. Throughout the year, the enslaved community was also allowed to celebrate Christian holidays like Easter and Christmas by arranging feasts or barbecues. In her journal, Lady Nugent tells of a time when those who were enslaved by her and her husband gathered in the yard for an Easter celebration; here, Lady Nugent discussed the food served:

> A long table was spread on the green, with all their most favourite dishes, of barbecued hog, jerked hog, pepper-pot, yams, plantation, &c. There were tubs of punch, and each of them had three glasses of Madeira, to drink three toasts – 'Massa Gubernor, and Missis, and little Massa [Lady Nugent's husband, Lady Nugent herself, and their newborn son].'[75]

Thereafter, the festive group begins to dance, and Lady Nugent joins them to the dismay of the White maids. On an average day, most enslaved men and women ate while working in the field except for dinner after tending to their own provision gardens. They then gathered together at nightfall and ate dinner as a community in their living quarters to enjoy the little free time to socialize and rest. During the cooler winter months, the lit hearth provided warmth in the small quarters where they slept, while outdoor fire pits were more popular in the humid summers.[76]

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[75] Nugent, 187
[76] Harris, 99.

According to Harris, archeologists only began to take an interest in the living quarters of the enslaved in the 1960s, and the results of the excavations indicate that enslaved Africans used a wide range of utensils from "Chinese porcelain to Rhenish stoneware."[77] In addition, pottery once thought to be Native American was also found to be created by enslaved people with pottery skills. These findings have also shown that enslaved Africans continued to utilize traditional African cooking methods of the "one-pot meals" that used produce from the provision gardens and any meat they could catch like possums, rabbits, and raccoons.[78]

Figure 7. A Southern Barbecue by Horace Bradly (1862–1896), published in Harper's Weekly in July 1887. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.[79]

[77] Harris, 100.
[78] Harris, 100.
[79] Horace Bradly, *A Southern Barbecue*, *Harper's Weekly*, July 1887, Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Southern_Barbecue.jpg.

The sketch by Horace Bradley (1862–1896) titled, *A Southern Barbecue,* published in *Harper's Weekly* in July 1887, provides some insight into what celebratory feasts may have looked like for enslaved people in the Americas as these culinary traditions have been passed on for generations (*Figure 7*). One man is watching over the traditional one-pot meal while others are gathered around watching the "high on the hog" barbeque and spit roasting the meat. Much like Lady Nugent's account, several gather around a long table in the grass under the shade of a tree waiting for their meal. Today, lighting the barbecue may be symbolic of freedom and independence, but the history of the barbecue is infused with the treacherous story of those who could not enjoy freedom in the New World for several centuries.

While White colonists, free Black people, and the enslaved ate and enjoyed many similar foods, many colonists stigmatized non-European cuisine and exotic fruits and vegetables by referring to them as "Negro's food."[80] For instance, when Barham describes several types of yams, he specifically points out a yam from Africa stating there is "another sort, of a coarse sulphur-colour or yellowish yam, called negro-yams."[81] The plantain tree, specifically, is frequently drawn in sketches and paintings of the living quarters of the enslaved as colonists associated the banana with enslaved Africans and the topics (*Figure 5*). Barham mentions the plantain in *Hortus Americanus* writing, "the fruit of this tree is the best of all Indian food for negroes," ignoring that several white colonists also relied on the tree for food.[82] Though the plantain or banana originated in Southern Asia and made its way to Africa through the Monsoon Exchange, the fruit tree was well-established in West Africa hundreds of years before the arrival of Europeans.[83] The plantain then made its way across the Atlantic as a provision

[80] Julien-Joseph Virey, *Natural History of the Negro Race* (Charleston, South Carolina: D.J. Dowling, 1837), 80
[81] Barham, 211-212.
[82] Barham, 148.
[83] Carney and Rosomoff, 14

food and dates back to sixteenth-century plantation societies in the Caribbean.[84]

Historian John Soluri wrote a book, published in 2005, exclusively devoted to the history of the banana. According to Soluri, the banana in Western society came to symbolize backwardness, laziness, and otherwise primitive and unsophisticated people. The association of the banana with these attributes did not change in the nineteenth century despite the economic boom of the banana industry, and some may argue the stigma continues to this day.[85] The racialization of food, like the banana, subjectifies enslaved Africans. Illustrations of banana trees did not solely document what enslaved Africans ate but also perpetuated stereotypes colonists placed on Black men and women.

While enslaved men and women occasionally ate pork, chicken, and fish, they also supplemented their diets by trapping and cooking lizards, turtles, possums, and other animals depending on where they lived in the Americas. During her time in Antigua, Maria Riddle (1772–1808) wrote, "Indeed it is a well-known fact in the West Indies, that, when the Negroes want to catch lizards, (which are a wholesome and favorite food with them) the art they employ to allure them into their hands is whistling."[86] She also refers to turtles as a "one of the greatest delicacies in the West Indies," a food that both free colonists and the enslaved dined on when possible.[87] Lady Nugent also mentions Creoles considering iguana lizards as a "great delicacy," but in the context of her journal, iguana is served in replacement of chicken as a "joke"

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[84] Carney and Rosomoff, 113

[85] John Soluri, *Banana Cultures Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 35-36.

[86] Maria Riddle, *Voyages to the Madeira, and Leeward Caribbean isles: with sketches of the natural history of these islands* (Edinburgh: printed for Peter Hill, and T. Cadell, 1792), 66, https://archive.org/details/voyagestomadeira00ridd_0/page/66/mode/2up?q=lizards.

[87] Riddle, 63.

which made "the party very merry."[88] In her research, Harris even provides a few recipes handed down from generations, one of which includes the use of roasted possum cooked with yams.[89] Since enslaved Blacks only could hunt and trap in the evenings after tending to their day-long plantation labor, nocturnal animals like possums, raccoons, and rabbits became easy targets.[90]

For those who managed to grow extra food in provision gardens, they could often sell their surplus and other homemade wares at local slave-run markets held on Saturdays or Sundays. These markets offered some independence to enslaved men and women as they gathered outside of the fields to enjoy what free time they had as well as earn some money and buy extra items if they could manage. Food grown in provision gardens and bought at markets made its way into cooking pots and tables of enslaved communities as well as any trapped animals or livestock provided by their enslavers. While enslaved men, women, and children found nourishment in whatever was available, which often required innovation on their part, wealthy plantation owners and colonists often scoffed at unconventional cuisine and racialized certain produce. Nevertheless, food became a crucial aspect of cultural identity among the enslaved community that brought them together in times of hardship.

Conclusion: Race, Identity, and Culinary Memory

The food and plants growing in provision gardens cultivated a strong, shared identity and culture among African and Afro-Caribbean peoples born or forced into slavery. Provision gardens granted enslaved men and women some form of independence as they chose which crops and medicinal plants to grow on the land they were given. They also denormalize Western monoculture agricultural processes and the need to establish dominance over the landscape as subaltern agrarian practices worked around natural

[88] Nugent, 261.
[89] Harris, 100, 253.
[90] Harris, 100.

landscapes like mountain-ground gardens. The gardens also provided incentives for further liberation since enslaved people could sell surplus at markets operated by enslaved people or provide enough provisions for enslaved men and women to escape from bondage and live in Maroon communities.

Moreover, the legacy of African botanicals and cuisine continues to shape dishes across the Americas and serve as a tangible object of collective memory. Traditional African crops like yams, okra, and plantains transferred to the New World and became intertwined with native plants like Cassava. Recipes using these foods were handed down from generation to generation, creating a common identity in the food that was shared at the table. Medicinal knowledge also made its way across the Atlantic. The various herbs growing inside these gardens provided medicine for enslaved communities, as well as colonists trying to survive on the islands. However, the autonomy gained from the provision grounds generated paranoia among enslavers who feared the superior botanical knowledge of those they enslaved. The possibility of being poisoned by a person they considered human property heightened colonialists' anxiety over potential revolts.

Overall, the story of the provision garden is an overlooked but critical aspect of slavery in the colonial New World. Growing on these plots of land were symbols of freedom, identity, and survival. Even after being uprooted from their homes, both people and plants grounded themselves against all odds and shared a history of strength and resilience.

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Brittany Mondragon graduated from California State University, San Bernardino in May 2022 with a master of arts degree in history. Backed with a master of science degree in geographic information systems from the University of Redlands, Brittany concentrates on issues revolving around environmental history, the history of science (specifically ethnobotany), colonialism, and trade. Her thesis explores the intersectionality of race, gender, and botany in the British colonial Atlantic during the eighteenth century by examining the appropriation and management of enslaved women, their uses of ethnobotanical medicines, and the power relations behind their depiction as witchcraft practitioners. She will start teaching at community colleges this year and possibly begin pursuing a doctoral degree in history. She currently works at Mt. San Jacinto Community College under the Professional Development department. Apart from scholarly pursuits, Brittany enjoys painting, hiking, gardening, playing board games, and learning the harp. She would like to thank Dr. Jeremy Murray and her editors for all of their support, guidance, and encouragement throughout the editing process.