



The Apology That **SHOOK** a Continent

In December, a group of international leaders—including presidents and congressmen—formally repented for their ancestors' role in the slave trade.

Observers say an ancient wound was healed that day.

There is nothing biologically different about the sand on the beaches of West Africa. It's the same as sand anywhere else: tiny fragments of rock, a telltale sign of corrosion. But on this beach in Ouidah, Benin—where slave ships likely were docked 400 years ago—strangers in this nation wonder what secrets the tiny grains know, what stories they would tell if only they could speak.

As the small band of African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans assembles near the mouth of the infamous Gate of No Return, they're haunted by the past. They can imagine the chains around the necks of African slaves as they walked

BY ADRIENNE S. GAINES

African Diaspora

North America

Newport
Boston

New York
Philadelphia
Charleston
Savannah
New Orleans

Mexico City
Veracruz

Havana

South America

Pernambuco
Bahia
Rio de Janeiro

Buenos Aires

Lisbon

Af





through this gate—beyond which they would be packed like animals aboard ships, never to see their homeland again. They can almost feel the desperation and see the fear in their ancestors' eyes.

Untold millions died en route to that strange new world, their bodies tossed recklessly into the sea. The waves washed their tears; the sand cradled them.

It is almost unbearable for the group to imagine. Tears moisten their eyes as they stare out at the ocean and remember their own struggles.

A voice breaks through the reverie. Emeka Nwankpa, coordinator of Intercessors for Africa based in Ghana, is explaining the significance of repentance. He wants his African brothers and sisters from the Diaspora to realize their inheritance as people of African descent.

“The next millennium is the African millennium,” he tells them.

Nwankpa is no stranger to grief. His land has been “unnaturally poor,” he says, for centuries—partly because of curses pronounced by slaves as they exited the coast. Repentance would bring healing to both sides of the Atlantic, he believes, and he invites the Americans and Caribbeans forward.

“We know how terrible the history of this gate was,” Nwankpa says. “Jesus has the key. When He opens a gate no man can shut it; when He closes a gate no



LEFT: Map of slave trade migration
ABOVE: Participants renounce the curses that slaves pronounced when they left the African coast.

man can open it.”

Nwankpa invites African intercessors from Benin and Nigeria forward, and together they kneel at the feet of their brothers and sisters from the other side of the world—some with their faces literally in the sand—repenting for the sins of their fathers, blessing the feet of their brothers and breaking the “remaining chains” that have kept them all in bondage. The group then walks together to the shore, anointing the land with oil and pronouncing blessings over it as the waves crash violently at their feet.

An aerial view of this scene would show police and Beninese soldiers—sent at President Mathieu Kérékou’s command—flanking the beach to protect

BELOW: African intercessors bless the feet of African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans, praying that they will take home the message of reconciliation.





ABOVE: Kérékou receives a sculpture titled *Reconciliation* from the city council of Liverpool, England.
BELOW: Attendees from a variety of backgrounds hold up their hands to illustrate the greed that came between African brothers.

these spiritual soldiers. This worship service could never have happened, participants say, if God hadn't turned the heart of a king and given him a burden to bring healing to those still reeling from the horrors of the slave trade.

Kérékou's goal was simply to issue a national apology for the role his ancestors played in capturing and selling other Africans into slavery. In fulfilling that

vision, Kérékou, a born-again Christian, invited representatives from the United States and the Caribbean to join him as his honored guests for the Leaders' Conference on Reconciliation and Development, held in Cotonou, Benin, Dec. 1-5. Also attending were international Christian leaders—including Sen. James Inhofe, R-Oklahoma; and Rep. Tony Hall, R-Ohio—who would join Kérékou in issuing apologies.

For many of the African Americans traveling to their homeland for the first time, Kérékou's apology marked the first time a native African has admitted to having had a role in the slave trade. Perhaps Kérékou was brought to the kingdom for such a time as this—to bring healing to nations.

Touching Heaven, Changing Earth

The auditorium of the international conference center is abuzz with excitement as roughly 600 conferencegoers await the arrival of the president. The African Americans in the crowd seem right at home among these strangers.

EVERETT HAMILTON



Mathieu Kérékou



Rep. Tony Hall

Former diplomats from France and Ghana, international businessmen from Europe, and intercessors from around the world round out the crowd.

All rise as President Kérékou enters, flanked on either side by armed soldiers. He isn't imposing—a slight man with dark brown skin and gray hair—but the respect he commands is evident. He takes his place at the center of the platform. To his left and right are heads of nations, including the president of the National Assembly of Togo, the president of Ghana and the vice president of the Dominican Republic.

"This is not a political or economic conference," Kérékou tells the crowd. "This is a spiritual conference. It has been placed under the protection of God almighty."

Each platform guest takes a turn expressing his reasons for attending this historic meeting. "You can say I'm sorry a million times; but one great forgiveness—that's what I want to see coming out of this," Sen. Inhofe says. "When God forgives us, He forgets. I am here today to ask for that divine forgiveness, and I would do so on behalf of the ancestors of white America and white Europe and those individuals who were responsible for the [slave] trade."

Rep. Hall adds that an apology was "the right thing to do" and that it would set a historical precedent.

In 1997, when Hall realized that the U.S. government had never apologized for slavery, he attempted to introduce a resolution in Congress. It read: "To resolve by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring, that the Congress apologizes to African Americans, whose ancestors suffered as slaves under the Constitution and the laws of the United States until 1865."

But the simple statement unleashed a barrage of opposition because it exploded on the political scene at the same time as President Clinton's dialogue on race. "Both conservatives and liberals and blacks and whites dismissed



Waking the Sleeping Giant

African American churches are rising to the cause of global evangelism. But there is still much work to do.

it as a meaningless gesture or an avoidance of trying to solve the problem," said Hall, who plans to reintroduce the resolution this year.

"I know my resolution won't fix the lingering injustice resulting from slavery, but reconciliation does begin with an apology," he said. "Hopefully God will take this conference and these apologies and start to heal—start to close this wound."

Michael Fenton-Jones, president of the International Christian Chamber of Commerce (ICCC), led Europeans through a tearful repentance for the atrocities their ancestors committed. "I believe God has prepared Africa through the indescribable misery and anguish for a very special purpose in the end times," Fenton-Jones told the crowd. "I believe it is time for Africa to arise and shine, for her light has come and the glory of the Lord is risen over your heads."

Though not the focus of the conference, at the back of many Africans' minds was the hope that Africans from the Diaspora—particularly "wealthy" African Americans—would help African nations rebuild. "This country, you could say, is in a famine," said J. Gunnar Olson, founder of the ICCC, "and its greatest asset may be Africans of the Diaspora."

Like Ghanaian President Jerry John Rawlings, some are looking for the "prayer of action," embodied through "Josephs," who though rejected by their family have been put in a position to help. "One of the major breakthroughs I believe we will be seeing as a result of this conference [is] the hurts that are being carried by African Americans are beginning to be healed, and they will be able to come back and redeem the land," Fenton-Jones told *Charisma*.

And not a moment too soon. "Within the next 25 years, we might be facing a global unemployment of up to 80 percent of the working population," Fenton-Jones says. "And with the increase in population from 6 billion to 9 billion, 84 percent of that increase will be in developing nations. You can see



Brian Johnson

While some are hoping "Josephs" will return to the continent to help native Africans rebuild their nations, missionary Brian Johnson wants to see more Africans of the Diaspora serving as missionaries to help mediate tribal conflict and to evangelize the 10/40 Window—a region between the 10th and 40th parallels north, stretching from North Africa to East Asia.

Out of 36 million African Americans, 22 million profess Christianity, Johnson says—but only 300 African American missionaries have been sent out from black churches to participate in foreign missions.

Johnson has dedicated his life to increasing that number and today is the national coordinator of a Virginia Beach, Virginia-based group called COMINAD—the Cooperative Missions Network of the African Dispersion—which is designed to educate African American churches about the need for foreign missionaries and to support churches' missionary efforts.

Part of his determination stems from his experiences as a missionary in Liberia for 25 years. His wife's father, a native Liberian, was murdered as a result of tribal conflicts in the nation. "Christians were fighting as well as everyone else," Johnson says. "So to reconcile Christians first, they could speak to their own tribes and convince them to reconcile. But first we had to get the right mediators."

Johnson hopes the Benin conference and the ensuing voyage will create an awareness among Africans of the Diaspora of the need to send black missionaries to Africa. "If this process works," he says, "African Americans will come, not just to observe the Gate of No Return, but to help Africa with its unity problem."

Few are aware that one of the first missionaries to leave American soil

was a black man named George Liele in 1782. Lott Carey and David George followed in his steps. But Jack Gaines, missions pastor at Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, says the horrors of slavery later caused

African Americans to refocus their attention domestically.

"As blacks became more in bondage, their commitment to missions lessened," Gaines says.

"Blacks became their own support system and mission field."

Daisie Whaley, a 30-year missionary in the Ivory Coast, says the black church is a "sleeping giant."

"I believe God has a very special purpose for the African American church," Whaley says. "We're not struggling to pay our rent anymore. If God has brought us that far, we need to reach back and help other people."

Some believe people like Patricia Harris, president of Marketing 1-2-1 Consulting Group in Atlanta, represent the face of the new missionary. Harris hopes to use her marketing skills to help African nations improve their infrastructure.

"I want to see Africa take full advantage of the natural resources that are there," she says. "I was never able to understand, with all the natural resources in Africa, why the poverty was there. Establishing strong economic ties between Africans and African Americans is very important to me."

COMINAD is making headway. "Many African American church leaders had not been outside of their own country," Johnson says. "Now they are concerned, and they're asking, 'What are we going to do?'" □



**George Liele
c.1750-1820**



Patricia Harris

To contact COMINAD, call (757) 420-9490; e-mail IAAMM@aol.com; or write 821-K Sunnyside Dr., Virginia Beach, VA 23464.

PHOTO OF GEORGE LIELE COURTESY OF THE FISK UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

there will be an enormous need for resources.”

And the world will be looking to Africa, Fenton-Jones believes—“the richest continent in terms of the potential of its soil.”

Along the Slave Road

On the second day of the conference participants took a painful journey through Ouidah, walking the same road slaves traveled before being loaded on ships. The first stop was an old Portuguese fort, recently converted into a museum. Chains once used to bind slaves were now on display along with maps of the trade routes and relics from voodoo rituals. Most disturbing, perhaps, was the chapel that sits in the center of the fort.

From there, participants viewed the memorial site for the Market Tree, where slaves were displayed to be sold to the highest bidder. From this point, slaves were marched to the Tree of Forgetfulness, where they were forced to participate in a ritual designed to rid them of all memories of their homeland. A memorial now sits where the tree, then believed to have special powers, once stood.

Next was the Hut of Zomaï, where slaves were tortured if they tried to rebel. Zomaï, which means “no light,” was a place where slaves were prepared for “lives of promiscuity and obscurity,” the memorial plaque reads.

From the Hut of Zomaï, participants were transported to the Room for the Common Grave, where hundreds of African slaves are buried. Some were killed for resisting captivity; others, deemed unsellable after inspection, were buried alive. Representatives from Nigeria, Holland and the United States led the group in a prayer vigil on the site.

Those slaves who survived the tortures of Zomaï went on to the Tree of Return. They were marched around this tree in order for their spirits to return to the continent when they died.

Last, participants held a tearful vigil on the beach at the Gate of No Return.

“Twelve million slaves passed through this gate,” said Bishop David Perrin, founder of Church of the Great Commission in Camp Springs, Maryland, and the African American representative among the platform guests. “The fact that that happened in this place in my soul is overwhelming. My soul weeps.”

Perrin invited other attendees to share what they were feeling after taking the tour. A woman from California told the group that as she left for Africa, her friends asked her to bring them an odd souvenir—dirt.

“We want a place to belong,” she said. “I can only go back two generations—my mother and my grandmother. I asked an African couple last night how many generations they could go back. They looked at me strangely and said, ‘I know them all.’ There is no ‘all’ for us. We want to identify with this place in some way. I brought a bag, and I’m taking home dirt.”

During the conference, which melded European, Western and African views of the slave trade, participants met in working sessions to dialogue about the effects of slavery and how to achieve reconciliation. The Beninese government also issued a book documenting the slave trade from the African perspective.

At the closing ceremony, Perrin told the delegates what so many African Americans were feeling: “In the back of every African American’s mind has been an unthinkable thought: that our



Inside the gates of hell: Participants were amazed to find a chapel in the center of the Portuguese slave fort.

African brothers and sisters, by an act of their own will, would sell their own brothers and sisters. As African Americans we have always blamed white people. We have never dared to think, *Would a brother, could a brother, would a father, could a father, sell his own blood?*

“The reason we love you, [Mr. President], is because you have said what no one else was willing to say, that we as Africans had a part. Without a seller there could be no buyer. To stand and say, ‘I am accountable,’ this, Mr. President, is no small thing. And by the faith of Christ, we forgive it all.”

A Ministry of Reconciliation

International prayer leaders believe God’s purposes are just beginning to unfold. “This has begun a process that will ultimately shut the door on racism, particularly on the continent of Africa,” says prayer leader Nancy Coen, who is



Jack Gaines



Africa’s trail of tears: Artwork depicting captive Africans marching around the Tree of Forgetfulness is on display at the museum in Ouidah.

affiliated with the Daniel Track of the Spiritual Warfare Network.

The next step is an ambitious voyage slated for November that will bring up to 3,000 African Americans and blacks from the Caribbean on a cruise ship to retrace the slave route from Ghana to Senegal to Ouidah. There the group will walk back through the Gate of No

Return to reverse the curse, and the gate will then be renamed the Gate of Return.

For Jack Gaines, the voyage will help lift a burden he's been carrying most of his life. Missions pastor at Calvary Evangelical Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, Gaines had long been plagued by the need for African Americans to move beyond victim status.



Emeka J. Okoli, a Nigerian, prays at the Room for the Common Grave.

Healing a 400-Year-Old Wound

A historic statement of repentance seeks to reverse the curses of slavery.

Working to bring reconciliation among peoples of African descent is nothing new for Emeka Nwankpa. For the last 26 years, he's been traveling through Africa and the United States praying at slave ports, repenting before African American congregations and organizing Africans within the continent to pray for God's purposes to be fulfilled.

He believes the next millennium is the "African millennium," but that in order for people of African descent to share in the inheritance of the world's wealthiest continent, they must be reconnected to the land. In order to help "reconnect the blood lines," the group Nwankpa coordinates, Intercessors for

and reading the accounts of many books concerning the most tragic and terrible events of the slave trade;

"And having undertaken journeys during which some of us visited Trinidad, Jamaica, parts of the United States...and all the former slave ports of West Africa from Badagry in Nigeria through Elmina in Ghana; Banjul in Gambia to Goree in Senegal, during which we brought messages and prayed prayers of repentance for the slave trade;

"We, the Intercessors for Africa, a continental network of national intercessory bodies and organizations, for and on behalf of the body of Christ in mainland Africa, do hereby acknowledge and confess the heinous wickedness of our ancestors in being the sellers during the slave trade.

"We cringe in shame and remorse when we contemplate the facts that millions of people died during the transatlantic crossing, and millions more endured the most gruesome sufferings, agonies, tortures, humiliations, abuse and exploitation in the Americas and the Islands working in plantations. Furthermore, we have read and seen the effects and vestiges of slavery in the lives of the present-day descendants of our brothers and sisters.

"The betrayal, rejection, exploitation and abuse have had manifest spiritual and social consequences.

"We bring this corporate repentance as one step in addressing these. We do humbly ask you to forgive us for these

sins against you and your ancestors. Our prayer is that the blood of Jesus will atone for these sins and that you will receive release on account of the 30 pieces of silver for which He was sold, which was to cancel the spiritual price of slavery.

"We also understand that as your kinsmen, we can exercise spiritual authority to make a spiritual emancipation declaration through prayer. We hereby urge the body of Christ in the Americas to do the same so that the release will be effected in the realm of the Spirit.

"We believe that God's end-time purpose for Africans and Africans in the Diaspora will be fulfilled. Just as the Jews came out of Africa after 400 years of slavery in Egypt, it is time to

appropriate the mercies of God on the part of all concerned among peoples of Africa and of African descent in the Diaspora and obtain spiritual release to enter their God-given inheritance as the champions in the next move of God on the earth and in the nations.

"We as priests and kings redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ pray and proclaim release from the spiritual limitations arising from slavery and seek to reconnect with you as our relatives and establish reconciliation for the glory of God and for the purposes of His kingdom on earth.

"We love you and bless you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." □



At the Hut of Zomai, slaves were tortured if they tried to rebel.

Africa, has issued this statement of repentance to Africans of the Diaspora:

"Having been convicted by the Spirit of God, and upon seeing the artifacts



Emeka Nwankpa

Hearing the stories of slavery seemed to open a wound that wouldn't heal.

But a phone call one Sunday evening in October 1996 began a series of events that would change Gaines' life. During a visit to the United States, Beninese Foursquare pastor Romaine Zannou had randomly searched the yellow pages for African American churches. He called three, including Gaines' church, asking for the missions pastor. Gaines was the only one who returned his call.

Zannou, who led Kérékou to the Lord in 1993, told Gaines that his church had been "tremendously burdened" by the need for reconciliation among peoples of African descent. The next day, Gaines says, God gave him the idea for the voyage.

Meanwhile, as Zannou continued meeting with the president for Bible studies, Kérékou began to express his own desire for reconciliation, and soon it became a national effort. Kérékou even issued license plates in French and English that read "Forgive" and "Pardon."

In May 1997 Gaines met with prayer leaders John Dawson and Pat Chen as Chen embarked on a prayer journey through the slave ports in West Africa. During that journey, Chen says, the group proclaimed prophetically that people of African descent would return to the land and bless it with their prayers, finances, education and technology.

Gaines and Kérékou finally met a month later in South Africa, where the two discussed the voyage and, along with missionary Brian Johnson and Zannou, bathed the idea in prayer.

Because Kérékou was anxious to organize an event before 2000, the group began planning the conference first.

Today Gaines doesn't see himself as a victim, and he urges African Americans to forgive. "God is the ultimate victim of the slave trade," he says. "God wants us to know that the atrocities we commit against men ultimately is sin against God. And He has paid the price to forgive our sin."

Looking toward the voyage, Gaines remembers the worship service on the beach. And suddenly he's amazed by the

irony of it all.

"When I saw all those black people walking down to the beach, I couldn't help but think of my ancestors walking down to that beach with chains around their wrists and ankles, not knowing the misery they were walking into," Gaines says. "Isn't it just like God to bring [the slaves] back as the richest, most educated blacks in the world," he says. "And it was only because of their faith." □

.....
ADRIENNE S. GAINES is an associate editor for *Charisma and Ministries Today*. For more information about the voyage, contact *Global Destinations* at (800) 557-7992. To order a documentary of the conference, call *Benchmark Media Services* at (757) 671-7578.