Global Timbuktu

Meanings and Narratives of Resistance in Africa and the Americas

An Initiative by the Rutgers Center for African Studies

March 24, 2017: Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
March 25, 2017: Burlington County, NJ
Project Description

The Rutgers Center for African Studies is directing Global Timbuktu: Meanings and Narratives of Resistance in Africa and the Americas, a series of educational and scholarly initiatives in both the U.S. and Mali, focused on the place of Timbuktu, Mali in the history, culture, and imagination of Africa and its global diaspora. The historic city of Timbuktu (Tombouctou) on the northern bend of the Niger River in what is now Mali has been an important center of trade and West African Islamic learning for almost a thousand years. Today, Timbuktu is often represented in the popular imagination as a distant and mythic site of mystery and frontier. In the mid-19th century, African American freepersons and abolitionists in Burlington County, New Jersey (1826) and the Adirondack area of New York State (1846) gave the name “Timbuctoo” to their new settlements that were associated with the struggle against slavery. The New Jersey “Timbuctoo” was a station on the Underground Railroad and the settlement in the Adirondacks was the home and is the burial site of John Brown, the radical abolitionist. By calling their settlements “Timbuctoo” these settlers linked their own struggle for freedom and equality with the prestige of this legendary center of Islamic scholarship and African accomplishment.

This Rutgers project brings together a range of specialists, including international Islamic scholars working to preserve the scholarly heritage and rich libraries of Timbuktu; archeologists engaged in excavation projects in Mali, New York, and New Jersey; and historians of African and African American history.

The project includes: a professional development workshop for New Jersey teachers; a “Student to Student” SKYPE project for New Jersey and Malian students; the visit of a Malian secondary school teacher to New Jersey and New York area schools; an exhibit – “Dreaming of Timbuctoo” - on the New York State settlement; and an international symposium at Rutgers University and Burlington County, New Jersey involving scholars and other specialists from Mali, South Africa, and the U.S.

For more information please contact the Center for African Studies:
848.445.6638 or co160@scarletmail.rutgers.edu

For more information, visit:
http://ruafrica.rutgers.edu/
www.timbuootoonj.com/
rancocasvillagenj.org/wths_reference/timbuctoo-memorial/
www.adirondack.net/history/timbuctoo/
Timbuktu, Mali

According to most accounts, Timbuktu was founded in the 12th century. Popular etymology of the name attributes it to the site where a slave named Buktou lived. It is located 15 km north of the bend in the Niger River in the arid borderlands of the Sahara. Timbuktu was in a good location to be an entrepôt of regional trade networks that brought salt mined in the Sahara to the south in exchange for gold, grain, and other items which were sent north. Timbuktu also became an important site in the trans-Saharan trade that connected North and West Africa. Incorporated into the Mali Empire in the 14th century, the town welcomed several Muslim scholars who returned with its ruler Mansa Musa, (c 1280-c1337) from his pilgrimage (1324-1325) to Mecca. One of these was a Spanish architect who built the Grand Mosque (Djingerebeer) in Timbuktu. The wealth of Mali attracted other scholars to West Africa, and this helped to inaugurate the beginnings of a very serious engagement with the fullness of Islamic knowledge. The Mali Empire lost control of Timbuktu in 1433. It was brought under the power of the expanding Songhay Empire in 1468, when it was conquered by Sunni Ali Beer.

The city was never a seat of political power, nor the capital city of a large state. Instead, it was a port city on the southern shore of the Sahara desert. The tradition of Islamic scholarship that developed there was not beholden to a royal court or a state; instead, Muslim scholars were able to operate much more independently with less need to compromise with non-Muslim religious practice. The destruction of the Songhay Empire at the hands of a Moroccan invasion in 1591 did result in Timbuktu becoming the temporary seat of the Moroccan occupation and its successor state known as the Arma, but from the 17th century Timbuktu declined in political importance even as it continued to act as a commercial entrepôt and site of Islamic scholarship. Conquered by the French in 1893, the city regained some of its luster as a provincial capital and garrison center. Since independence in 1960, tourism has played an important role in reshaping the city when the security situation allows it.

See http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/119/
Timbuctoo, New Jersey

Located in Westampton Township, Burlington County, Timbuctoo was settled by former slaves and free Blacks, beginning in 1826, with the help of local Quakers. Quakers supported Timbuctoo’s development by selling land at reasonable prices, providing employment, and in some cases, even mortgages subsequent to land purchases. It was one of a number of African American settlements in southern New Jersey that were associated with the anti-slavery movement. At its peak in the mid-nineteenth century, it had more than 125 residents, a school, a church, and a cemetery. Quaker influence was strong in Burlington County, which had also been the home of John Woolman, arguably the most prominent Quaker abolitionist of the eighteenth century.

The settlers in Timbuctoo were very involved in the Underground Railroad and the settlement was an important “station” on the Underground Railroad. At present, the only visible remnant of Timbuctoo’s past is the cemetery, which includes graves of Black Civil War veterans. Today’s Timbuctoo residents include some descendants of early settlers.

See http://www.timbuctoonj.com/
See http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/02/AR2010080205217.html
Timbuctoo, New York

In 1846, Gerrit Smith, a land-rich, deep-pocketed antislavery reformer from upstate New York, donated 120,000 acres in the Adirondack wilderness to 3,000 poor black men from New York. With these land gifts, Smith hoped to inspire a mass migration of black families from metropolitan New York to the northern frontier. His purpose was twofold. His land deeds would help his 3,000 “grantees” gain equal voting rights; since 1821, black New Yorkers lacking proof of $250 in landed property were not allowed to vote. Also, farming would ensure their economic independence and good standing in their new adoptive Adirondack communities.

The best-known enclave spawned by Smith’s initiative was Timbuctoo (also, Timbucto), a multi-family neighborhood in the hamlet of North Elba, near today’s Lake Placid. Timbuctoo would also come to stand for the black settlement effort overall, which had several outposts in Essex and Franklin Counties. In 1849, the sheep farmer and militant abolitionist John Brown, moved his large family close to Timbuctoo to help the black “grantees” build their farms. Ten years later Brown gained international fame with his bold and frustrated attempt to seize a federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in order to arm slaves and incite a regional revolt.

The great majority of Smith’s grantees would not move onto their Adirondack land. But those who did won a lasting page in regional history for their friendship with John Brown, their early efforts at community-building, and their service in the Civil War. No visible trace of the black Adirondack farm colonies survives. Only a few headstones in local cemeteries attest to Gerrit Smith’s long-neglected “scheme of justice and benevolence” of 1846.

See http://www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic29-1-2/exhibit.html
See http://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2016/03/timbuctoo-exhibit-finds-permanent-home.html
Symposium

Film Clips of Timbuktu

10:00am-10:25am  Greetings and Introductions
Rutgers Representative
Carolyn Brown and Paul Lovejoy

10:30am-11:25am  Keynote – Dialogue
Mahamane Mahamoudou, Timbuktu-trained Islamic Scholar, Timbuktu, Mali, with
Bruce Hall, Duke University

11:30am-12:45pm  Panel I  Timbuktu: Behind the Myths
Chair: Bruce Hall, Duke University
Mohamed Diagayété Senior Researcher, Ahmad Baba Center, Timbuktu
Mohamed Shahid Mathee, Department of Religion, University of Johannesburg
Mauro Nobili, Department of History, University of Illinois

1:00pm-2:15pm  Lunch

2:30pm-3:45pm  Panel II Archeological Report of all Timbuktus
Chair: Ousseina Alidou, Rutgers University
Hadley Kruczek-Aaron, SUNY Potsdam
Christopher Barton, Department of Archeology, University of Memphis
Daouda Keita, Archeologist, Université des Sciences Sociales et Gestion de
Bamako, Mali

3:45-4:00pm  Coffee Break

4:10pm-5:45pm  Panel III The Public and “Our” Timbuktus
Chair: Paul Lovejoy, York University, Canada
Amy Godine, Independent Scholar, Exhibition Curator
Guy-Oreido Weston, Descendant of 1829 Timbuctoo Settler
Alvin Corbett, Board Member, Underground Railroad Museum, Burlington Co., NJ

6:00pm-7:00pm  Reception and Exhibit
New Brunswick Theological Seminary
35 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ

Introduction to the Exhibit Dreaming of Timbuctoo
Martha Swan, Executive Director, John Brown Lives!
Global Timbuktu
Meanings and Narratives of Resistance in Africa and the Americas
Saturday, March 25, 2017 12:00pm-5:00pm

Site Visit

12:00pm-12:30pm  Tour of the excavation site, Westampton Township, NJ
Intersection of Church Street and Rancocas Road
Christopher Barton, Department of Archeology, University of Memphis

Symposium
Rancocas Valley Regional High School,
520 Jacksonville Road, Mount Holly, NJ 08060

Film Clips of Timbuktu

1:00pm-1:15pm  Greetings and Introductions
C. André Daniels, Mayor of Westampton
Representative of Rutgers
Carolyn Brown and Paul Lovejoy

1:15pm-1:30pm  Introducing Timbuctoo, New Jersey
Guy-Oreido Weston, Descendant of 1829 Timbuctoo Settler

1:30pm-2:45pm  Timbuktu: Behind the Myths
Chair: Bruce Hall, Duke University
Mohamed Diagayété, Senior Researcher, Ahmad Baba Center, Timbuktu
Mohamed Mathee, Department of Religion, University of Johannesburg
Daouda Keita, Archeologist, Université des Sciences Sociales et Gestion de Bamako, Mali
Mauro Nobili, Department of History, University of Illinois

3:00pm-4:15pm  Report on Timbuctoo in New York and New Jersey
Chair: Paul Lovejoy, York University, Canada
Hadley Kruczek-Aaron, SUNY Potsdam
Amy Godine, Independent Scholar, Exhibition Curator
Alvin Corbett, Board Member, Underground Railroad Museum of Burlington Co. NJ
Christopher Barton, Department of Archeology, University of Memphis

4:30pm-5:30pm  Reception

5:30pm-6:30pm  Dreaming of Timbuctoo Exhibit
Underground Railroad Museum Burlington Co., 803 Smithville Road, Eastampton, NJ
Greeting- Alvin Corbett, Board Member, Underground Railroad Museum
Introduction- Dreaming of Timbuctoo Martha Swan, Executive Director,
John Brown Lives!
New Jersey Underground Railroad

New Jersey served as a gateway for escaped slaves from the South. Runaway slaves crossed the Delaware River to reach Underground Railroad (UGRR) stations in Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), New York (New York City) and Canada (Toronto). Many runaways stayed in New Jersey’s numerous all-black communities that served as UGRR sanctuaries, such as Burlington County’s Timbuctoo. Burlington County, New Jersey was of particular significance to the UGRR and the abolitionist movement because it served as a hub for UGRR activities. It was the birthplace of John Woolman, a Quaker abolitionist whose writings helped to turn Quakers against slavery in the early 1800s. It was also the birthplace of black abolitionist, William Still, (Father of the Underground Railroad), who operated in Philadelphia. The state of New Jersey is of great significance to the UGRR movement because of its large number of all-black communities that served as UGRR sanctuaries for escaped slaves.

See https://dspace.njstatelib.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10929/24563/h6732002.pdf?sequence=1
New Jersey Underground Railroad

See http://www.state.nj.us/nj/about/history/underground_railroad.html
Bios of the Participants

Malian Participants

Mohamed Diagayété (Senior Researcher, Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques Ahmed Baba-IHERIAB) is a scholar of the Malian Fulani contribution to Islamic civilization during the 18th and 19th centuries. He looks at issues of literacy and scholarship through unique and previously unused sources, such as ajami manuscripts (Fulfulde written in the Arabic script).

Hawoye Fassoukoye (M.A. English Bamako University, B.A. language and literature Haidara High School in Bamako in 1997) teaches English at Kankou Moussa High School in Bamako. She was born and grew up in Timbuktu and teaches English as a foreign language. She has also worked as a translator. She will be visiting NJ and NY schools to establish a digital exchange program.

Daouda Keita (Université des Sciences Sociales et Gestion de Bamako, Mali) is an archeologist who has directed many archeological excavations in Mali. His interests include research in prehistory and archeology, ethno-archeology, cultural heritage and tourism. He has worked on the restoration of Timbuktu after the recent occupation.

Mahamane Mahamoudou (Popularly known as Cheick Hamou) is one of the leading Timbuktu-trained Islamic scholars. Formerly with IHERIAB, Cheick Hamou was an inspector of Arabic language education in the administrative district of Timbuktu. He is now involved with the preservation of the Timbuktu manuscripts.

South Africa Based Participant

Mohamed Shahid Mathee (University of Johannesburg) is a lecturer in the study of Religion and Islam. His research focuses on the use of Timbuktu fatwas to discuss social history, or more specifically micro history.

US Based Participants

Ousseina Alidou (Rutgers University) is a professor in Department of African, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Literatures and the author of Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger (2005) a runner-up for Aidoo-Schneider Book Prize of the Women’s Caucus of the Association of African Studies.

Christopher Barton (University of Memphis) is trained in historical archaeology and specializes in the networks race, class, and gender. His earlier research focused on Timbuctoo, New Jersey, and his latest book Historical Racialized Toys in the United States focuses on the socialization of Victorian Era children in ideologies of race.
Carolyn Brown (Rutgers University) is a historian whose primary research interests are in West African labor and urban social history with current emphasis on masculinity, nationalism, African involvement in World War II, and slavery in Southeastern Nigeria. She is a co-editor of *Africa and World War II* (2015).

Alvin Corbett (Underground Railroad Museum of Burlington County, NJ) is a researcher and history buff in the areas of African-American and 20th-century African history. He has traced his family history to Jack Sherrod, a slave who served in the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War.

Amy Godine (Independent scholar) is the curator of *Dreaming of Timbuctoo*, and other exhibitions focusing on northern New York’s social history. Her most recent book project, *The Black Woods*, is a narrative history of the Adirondack Timbuctoo in its own time and in memory.

Bruce S. Hall (Duke University) a historian of Islamic West Africa, who has conducted research in Timbuktu. He is the author of *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa: 1600-1960* and his current research is focused on circum-Saharan commercial networks connecting 19th century Ghadames (Libya) and Timbuktu.

Hadley Kruczek-Aaron (SUNY Potsdam) is a historical archaeologist who has excavated historic-period sites throughout the US and the Caribbean. She specializes in the 19th century and Northeast United States and is Director, Timbuctoo, NY Excavation Project.

Renée Larrier (Rutgers University) is the Chair of the Department of French. Her research interests are African and Caribbean literatures and literature by women. She has published on Francophone Caribbean and African literature.

Paul E. Lovejoy (Distinguished Research Professor, York University, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada) is a highly honored professor of African history with more than 300 publications. His *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* is a seminal work for African history. His most recent publication is *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions* (2016).

Mauro Nobili (University of Illinois) is a historian of pre-colonial and early-colonial West Africa, with an interest in the area of the modern Republic of Mali and the town of Timbuktu. His current project is an original study of the Timbuktu chronicle, the *Tarikh al-fattash*.

Martha Swan (Executive Director, John Brown Lives!) is the producer of the *Dreaming of Timbuctoo* Exhibition. She also teaches Spanish fulltime at a small public school and is involved in various social justice activities.

Guy Weston (Descendant of 1829 Timbuctoo Settler) has been engaged in genealogy research for 25 years, focusing primarily on his maternal ancestors in Timbuctoo, NJ, where his fourth great-grandfather bought his family’s plot in 1829 for $30. He is currently studying for the Professional Genealogist Certification exam.
We thank the following for generously supporting the Global Timbuktu Project

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New Jersey Amistad Commission
New Jersey Council for the Humanities
Rancocas Valley High School, Mount Holly, NJ
Rutgers University: AMESALL-Department of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Literatures, Center for African Studies, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Center for Race and Ethnicity, Department of French, Department of History, GAIA Centers -Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs, Paul Robeson Center, Program in Medieval Studies, The Chancellor’s Office, School of Arts and Sciences-Executive Deans Office, Dean of Humanities Office of Planning and Communications
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The Underground Railroad Museum of Burlington County, NJ
Westampton Township Middle School

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This event was planned by Global Timbuktu Project Committee:
Clovis Bergere, Carolyn Brown, Bruce Hall, Renee Larrier, Paul E. Lovejoy, Oumou Sidibe, Martha Swan, and Guy Weston.