



The Slave Trade Route: A Regional and Local Development Catalyst

Chuks Ugochukwu, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Department of Geography and Planning

St. Cloud State University

720 4th Avenue South SH339

St. Cloud, MN 56301. USA

Email: ccugochukwu@stcloudstate.edu

Phone: +1 320 308 2097

USA

Abstract

The conservation of and focus on slave export points turned tourist monuments in Cape Coast and Elmina, Ghana, are incomplete without linkages to other complicit places in the interior that together completes the chain of darkness, the trade in humans along the Atlantic coast of Ghana, as well as in the interior. Completed, it will highlight the infrastructure of the slave business, the domestic, as well as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. When the chain (route) of the different complicit communities in the interior to these export monuments along the Atlantic coast is conserved, it shall herald a completeness to the slave trade business infrastructure that otherwise was disjointed, isolated, diminished, and objectified as a sort of “retail tourism.” Devoid of authenticity, these retail tourism monuments to slavery are marketed to the ill-informed casual, impressionable visitor, desirable to satisfy the euphoria of visiting a significant slave monument

Keywords: Slave trade, tourism, conservation, Ghana, Trans-Atlantic, West Africa

The Slave Trade Route: A Regional and Local Development Catalyst

The conservation of and focus on slave export points turned tourist monuments in Cape Coast and Elmina, Ghana, as well as others, are incomplete without linkages to other complicit places in the interior that together completes the loops in the chain of darkness, the trade in humans along the Atlantic coast of Ghana, as well as in the interior. Completed, it will represent and highlight the infrastructure of the slave business, the domestic, as well as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. When the different complicit communities in the interior of Ghana, what is referred to here as the links in the chain, is conserved and linked to these export monuments along the Atlantic coast, it shall herald a completeness to the slave trade business infrastructure that otherwise was disjointed, diminished, and isolated, as a sort of “retail tourism” objectified. Devoid of authenticity, these retail tourism monuments to slavery are marketed to the ill-informed casual or impressionable consumer, tourists alike, desirable to satisfy the euphoria of visiting a significant slave monument. Herein lies the motivation to recreate, conserve, and link to those slave

trade monuments along the coast those aspects of the slave trade business infrastructure in the interior that together completes and constitute the slave trade route and the business of trade in humans in Ghana. The goal is to complete the chain of the slave trade business infrastructure, from the inland sites to the shipping points along the Atlantic coast and back inland. Thus, complete and elevate the visitor’s experience from that of novice consumer of an abbreviated story about the slave trade business, a hallmark of retail tourism, to a more complete picture of the business of slave trade, the trade in humans. As currently stand, the government in Ghana through their Tourism Board has focused their effort at conserving the so called “castles” (slave warehouses) in Cape Coast and Elmina, and working on others, for and to attract and boost tourist revenue. These monuments from which the slaves were exported that dot the coasts of West Africa present an incomplete picture about the slave trade business infrastructure without including key aspects of the slave trade, the routes from the interior to these export points, these export warehouse monuments (castles) that dot the Atlantic coast of West



Africa, thus, complete the slave trade chain that is the slave trade business and story.

The paper highlights an attempt to recreate and conserve one of Ghana's slave trade route, to identify, connect, and map "a" historic slave trade route from the prominent slave encampment in Pikworo, Paga through slave markets along the route at Kintampo, Kumasi, Assin Foso, Assin Manso, and other villages along the route, terminating at two slaves "castles," export points of the slaves in Cape Coast and Elmina (a UNESCO World heritage site). It should be noted that there are other slave trade routes from northern Ghana that linked other routes ultimately terminating at the numerous export points dotted along the Atlantic coast of Ghana and other today's West African countries such as Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon

A primary objective is to initiate the conservation of these slave trade routes, as well as engender conservation of the other slave trade routes, associated enablers and accessories that were complicit in the slave trade business. Further to promote education and scholarship, develop sustainable local and regional cultural heritage tourism (geo-tourism) that could be a catalyst for rural and regional planning and community development. Conservation of the slave's journey the route, from the hinterlands to these export points to compliment the monumental "castles" along the coast that have been conserved, completes the links in the chain of trade in humans that demands to be highlighted and exposed. The Underground Railroad slave trail in the USA is a model. The Underground Railroad tells the story of slave's journey to freedom from the southern parts of USA to the northern states and into Canada, as well as to Mexico and beyond in the south. The Underground Railroad route has mostly been conserved physically, including a variety of interactive digital platforms that have since been created and updated for public access.

Introduction

When tourists come to visit the slave trade monuments, "castles" as it is typically referred to, turned into one of Ghana's most popular tourist destination, which are export warehouses that held slaves before they are boarded into ships they are enameled by the sight and grandeur of these castles. A structure that I am not particularly happy about, that I associate with the rape of the indigenous people, I can only imagine the excitement for others who finally visits one of these significant monuments of the slave trade that dot the Atlantic

coastline of West Africa from Nigeria to Senegal. When I visited the Cape Coast and Elmina slave castles, looking to experience firsthand one of where the enslaved embarked on their journey from, I couldn't help but wonder that these monuments along the Atlantic coast of West Africa are just one piece out of the slave business infrastructures and networks through and where the enslaved journey started.

Nonetheless, the enslaved journey started from where they were captured, the places they were kept, sold or exchanged or resold, the trails that was used to take them to and from safe houses, the export points, and the different destinations they were exported to. Thus, visiting only these export monuments, or the other few monuments inland such as the slave encampments, slave markets, and location where the slaves took their last bath on their way for export, though a hallmark of tourism, tells a disjointed journey and story of the slave business and infrastructure. For someone interested in slavery, and that wanted to know where the slaves originated their journey from, capture points, through to the trails that brought them to slave markets along the way, to these export points along West Africa Atlantic coast, a picture of the full journey needs to be created that includes the routes (trails) used to transport these enslaved people to and through the different locations along the way to and from the coastal export points. According to Perbi (2007), it was a two-way journey, thus, by including the slave trade routes in preserving Ghana's slave trade history, the story of the physical chain that links and connected the network of locations involved in the slave trade business can be told, including to the tourist. Thus, for the concerned interests, a better appreciation of the slave trade history, a more complete picture of the business infrastructure, conserved for the historic value and connections to the past, for education and research, relatives and descendants of slaves, and tourists alike.

The other story line about the slave trade concerns those descendants and relatives of the enslaved that want to retrace their way 'home,' back to where their ancestors and relatives were captured, forcibly taken from, back to their ancestral villages in the hinterland. That is for those that after all these hundreds of years in the diaspora, as well as some locally, want to reconnect, retrace their way from these export points, back through the trails, the markets, the stop-over places, the camps, and back 'home' to their villages- a sort of reverse trip. What is involved



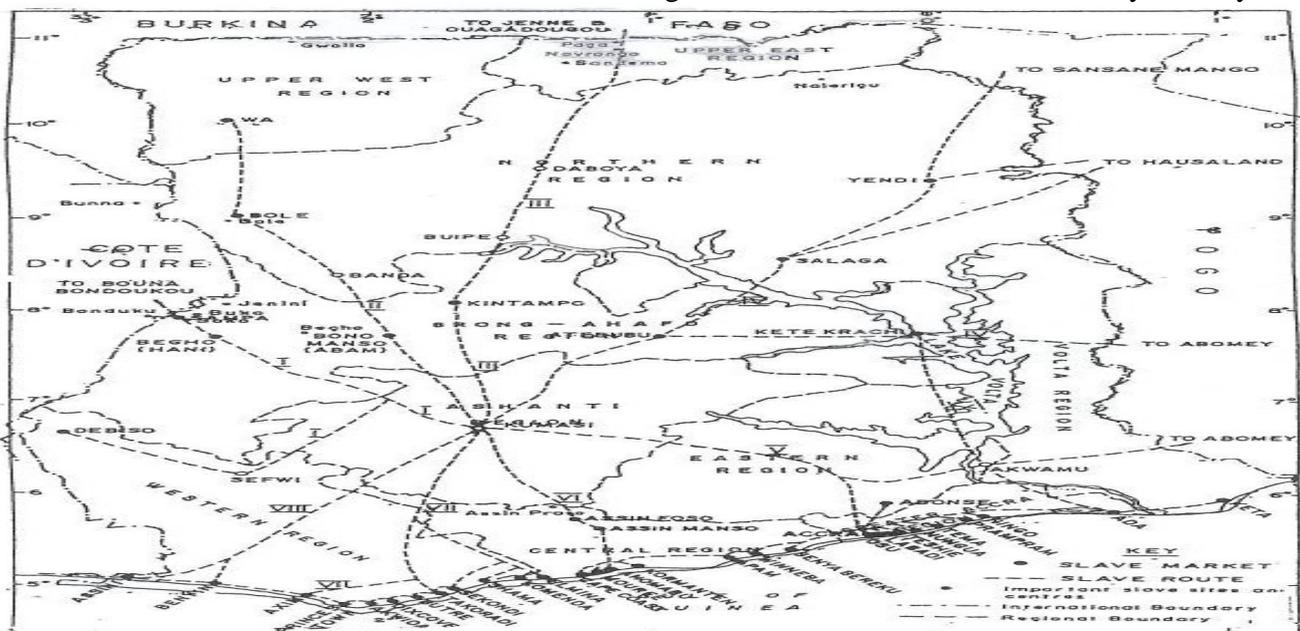
here is the conservation of the infrastructure of slavery and slave trade from the perspective that involved multiple points along the rural and regional chain of complicit communities, the two-way journey from the hinterland to the export points along the Atlantic coast of West Africa, and from the export points back inland, and through the complicit host communities that enabled the trade in human beings.

Perbi (2007) painstakingly detailed the history of the institution of domestic slavery, indigenous slavery that existed in pre-colonial Ghana, long before the trans-Atlantic trade became a major business undertaking. This domestic slavery pre-dated the Atlantic slave trade from the 15th Century, it co-existed with the trans-Atlantic trade in humans when it was introduced in Ghana in the 16th Century, and up to the early part of the 20th Century. Perbi's work on domestic slave trade within Ghana underscored the two-way directional use of these slave trade routes (trails) to and from the hinterland to the coastal export points, those castles, from which the slaves were exported in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. So, to the slave descendants and relatives, to the researcher, and to the tourists and casual observer alike, conserving the routes (trails) used in the slave trade captures and completes the chain of the trade in humans between the hinterland and the Atlantic coast export points and back inland.

The Slave Trade within and outside Ghana: Motivation to Conserve the Routes

While there is much information on slavery and the Atlantic slave trade, materials on domestic, indigenous slave trade is few, and has not gotten widespread publicity and attention as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Much of the coverage paid to the business of slavery in Ghana is mostly concentrated around the export points along the Atlantic coastal areas, and these are lacking the physical links (routes) inland. Thus, my interest in the conservation of the geography of this inhumane trade in humans. to the geography includes these export points along the Atlantic coast, the routes, markets, centers, and communities inland that were involved and part and parcel of the domestic slave trade, and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade system.

The nature of domestic slavery two-way movement, between inland and the coastal areas is highlighted by Perbi (2007) who noted that between 1811-1816, many captives from the Asante (inland people in central Ghana) Fante (coastal people along Ghana's Atlantic coast) wars in Ghana were sent to Kumasi (Inland community), as well as from other areas the Asante conquered in the numerous wars they engaged in (p. 35). This is to mention but one of many wars between many states in Ghana, coastal and inland, that sold their captives into slavery to buyers at the coastal areas and inland, as well as, to foreigners like Europeans that ultimately turned to buying slaves instead of gold and other mineral resources they initially traded in.



Source: Perbi, 2007
MAP I: Ghana's Slave Trade Routes, Markets, Key Sites and Centers



Other sources of the two-way trade in slaves besides those gotten from warfare, raids, pawned; tribute, gifts, convicts, betrayal, communal and private sales/deals, and kidnapping are the numerous slave markets all over Ghana. These markets used intricate network of trade routes (trails) that connected the markets within and between communities, and other African countries (Perbi, 2007. P. 37). Map I show the slave markets, sites and centers, and slave trade routes in pre-colonial Ghana.

Thus, the goal is to initiate the conservation of one of these many slave trade routes that span between the north and the export points of Cape Coast and Elmina along the Atlantic coast of Ghana. The hope is to endanger the conservation of others, to recreate the network that completes the chain that is the story of the institution and infrastructure of slavery in Ghana. The significance, the drive (on my part) for the conservation of these slave trade routes (trails) is captured and summed up in a statement by an African American (Tina Bailey) who went to Ghana severally “in the hope of connecting spiritually with West African ancestors sold into slavery.” She is one of many African Americans who travel to Ghana yearly to “follow in the footsteps of ancestors they cannot name who were enslaved and sent to the New World” (BBC News, 2007). Further, the statement that “But if this happened to my people, I can at least walk their path several times. It’s my connection to home. It’s probably the only way I’ll know where home is” Inspired my focus to retrace and conserve the slave routes. For relatives and descendants of enslaved people, the journey to walk the path the enslaved walked is critical and compelling, a homecoming, and the history is personal. With these trails conserved, a believable complete connection, the chain of the story of the slave trade, a sort of real homecoming could be experienced. For local and regional development, an enhanced opportunity to be a major revenue generator, local and regional economic development catalyst of sorts that will potentially usher in the development of this underused, underdeveloped geo-tourist asset. Further, it will provide various opportunities for education, research, and interactive platform for various audiences, create needed jobs throughout the communities in and near the trade route, and most importantly conserve this geo-tourist asset as is exemplified by the success with the conservation of the Underground Railroad in USA.

The Underground Railroad refers to the efforts, spontaneous and or highly organized, to assist persons held in bondage in North America to escape from slavery in the 19th Century and later (National Park Service, 2016). It represented a network of trusted complex communication systems, individual acts of bravery and suffering in the quest for freedom. It also encompasses acts of humanity by owners of hiding places, safe routes, churches, and other organizations that guided coordinated escapes of the enslaved to freedom from southern states, and rescues of arrested fugitives in the North to freedom in free states, Canada, Mexico and beyond (see Map II).

As I think about the complexity of the slave’s journey, I can’t help but think about how mainstream history has conditioned the masses in its minimizing, sort of dismissive of the horror and understanding of the cruelty that is the sale and suffering of humans. The thinking that the slave trade was an outward flow, a one-way journey from the hinterland to the coastal export points onward to the European, Asian, Caribbean, and American countries, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, couldn’t but be one story line. There was also the domestic, indigenous (internal) trade of the enslaved within Ghana as Perbi (2007) has commendably documented. As was with the Underground Railroad in the USA, the movement of southern slaves and rescued fugitive slaves was to both supposedly northern free states and Canada in the north, as well as to Mexico and beyond in the south. Likewise, recaptured fugitive slaves by bounty hunters (slave catchers) were returned to their slave owners back in the southern states, in a reverse movement, underscoring the two-way transporting of the slaves, as was the case in Ghana slave trade too. I can’t help but note the rarity of some very brave individuals that returned to the south, sometimes on several occasions, to guide more enslaved to freedom in the free states. This bravery was exemplified by the exceptional humanity of many people, such as John Brown, a slavery abolitionist, and Madam Harriet Tubman, a freed slave and most importantly a major figure in the Underground Railroad who lived free in the north of USA. She, like many sympathetic others made this very risky journey to themselves and the slaves south so many times to guide and coordinate the escape of numerous enslaved Africans to freedom from the nightmarish conditions in USA’s southern states using the Underground Railroad networks.

Conservation of Ghana Slave Trade Route: The Underground Railroad Model

The Underground Railroad as noted above tells the story of the enslaved and fugitive slaves escape to freedom in free states, Canada, Mexico, and beyond from the atrocious inhumane treatment in southern states, as well as, the

recapture of fugitive slaves and their return to their owners in the southern states slave by slave catchers. Currently, some of the fascinating individuals, routes (trails), and places associated with the Underground Railroad has been preserved and or conserved. Map II also shows most of the common routes of escape, and individual states that marked and preserved the locations of associated historic properties and assets. Exploring the routes, any interested party and tourists are provided descriptions and photographs on sixty-four (64) historic places (and counting) that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NPS), USA's official list of places important in the nation's history and worthy of preservation (NPS, 2016).



Source: Underground Railroad Routes, 2016

MAP II: The Underground Railroad Routes, USA

However, as much as the Underground Railroad conservation work is commendable, many of the complicit locations that was involved with the trade in slaves such as some slave markets, trails, places, and jails in especially southern states remain hidden, unaccounted, unrecognized, deliberately desecrated, and a forgotten history. Many structures associated with the trade in this inhumanity called slavery, were destroyed or repurposed after the US Civil War, converted into factories and warehouses for tobacco and cotton industries, covered in dirt from railroads and highways construction, or turned into parking facilities. After many decades of neglect, the history of the slave trade in many places in the south such as Richmond, VA; “Forks of the Road” market in Natchez, Mississippi; New Orleans, Louisiana; and states like Alabama, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, to mention but a few, remains buried, and neglected. Today, visitors to many of these complicit places would be hard-pressed to find any substantial, identifiable physical evidence of these state's participation in the atrocious trade in humans remaining (Gan, 2015).

Some of the many slave markets and places are still around today, hidden in plain sight, identified only by a simple marker that downplay, diminishes, and conceal these significant historic locations, some inappropriately camouflaged with renames like “public market place,” “market house,” etc. Other significant places slaves were sold are the county courthouses, of which many are still standing. The persistent concealment of this sordid past cannot be blamed on economic forces, or postwar destruction of these slave markets and other locations (Gans, 2015). This is a lesson for Ghana and others in the handling of their complicity with slavery, and how to move forward in acknowledging the past and how to begin to wholesomely conserve this heritage.

For Ghana and their attempt to preserve the institutions of slavery, the current efforts are concentrated on coastal export points (the castles) along the Atlantic coast that are popular “tourist destinations.” Though focused on boosting the tourism market, they tell an incomplete story that did not happen in isolation. Rather, there are chains and networks to other spaces, places, institutions,



and communities that when linked together compliments and completes the story of the slave trade in Ghana that demands to be holistically told and sustainably conserved. Consequently, these monuments, the slave castles turned “tourist destinations,” will adorn a new story, identity, meaning, and a completeness that otherwise was disjointed, diminished, and ill-connected, which is the practice and hallmark of “retail tourism.” The present emphasis and preoccupation with the development of the slave castles for primarily retail tourism consumption will remain devoid and lacking the true horror and experience of slaves before their arrival at these coastal export points. It devalues the interpretation by the castle guides of the horror at these export points, and accompanying artifacts, trinkets, and what have you of retail tourism that is marketed and sold to the ill-informed, casual, or impressionable tourists, as well as others who are desirable to satisfy and is happy with the euphoria of having visited a “significant slavery monument” at long last, may I say, possibly accompanying exclamation - destination reached, mission accomplished.

The objective of my pensive is to identify, connect, map, and sustainably conserve, as a starting initiative, one of the many significant historic slave trade routes in Ghana that goes from the prominent slave encampment in Pikworo, Paga, in northern Ghana, a border community with the country of Burkina Faso, through some of the slave markets along the route south such as Kintampo, Kumasi, Assin Foso, Assin Manso, and others, terminating at the two major slave “castles” (the export points) along Ghana’s Atlantic coast communities of Cape Coast and Elmina from where the enslaved were then exported to other places, being part of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade business. There are other routes from northern Ghana to other export points along Ghana’s coastline and to other destinations. Note that this Paga to Cape Coast and Elmina route also further extends into present day Burkina Faso to the north, and most likely beyond, that linked with the Trans-Sahara Trade route into Europe and Asia. Also, it branches out and connected other routes to other communities and countries to the east and west, that terminated at the many other export points that dot the Atlantic coastline of West African (see Map I).

One Slave Trade Route: Paga to Cape Coast and Elmina Slave Export Points

To identify and delineate the Paga to Cape Coast-Elmina slave trade route, field visits were conducted to those communities that were identified through archival

research as locations where significant events associated with slave trading occurred, a market, and other locations in the trade of enslaved people along the general geography of the route. Further archival research lead to other locations and communities that participated in, and enabled the trade in humans, and from that this slave trade route was establish. To create a modern walk able slave trade route, this route that is established through research field study will be superimposed on a current edition of Ghana communities, roads, and trails map using GIS. The aim is to set in motion the process to identify, delineate, and conserved the other slave trade routes, recreating the geography and experience of the point-to-point movement of the enslaved domestically and to the export points to the diaspora. In the process, facilitate local and regional economic development through job creation, establishment of service businesses, and opportunities for research and education.

From a geo-tourism development perspective, the goal is to recreate and sustainably conserve this route as a public walk able path that retraces the route that was used to cart away the enslaved from the different encampments, exchange locations, markets, and finally to the castles export points at Cape Coast and Elmina, as well as back to inland. This slave trade route highlights activities on a two-way direction: the direction that goes from the northern hinterland to the export points along the coast at Cape Coast and Elmina, and the reverse direction from the coast back to the northern hinterland and beyond (as Map I exemplify). The route represents a modern day walk able trail that can be used by slave descendants, tourists, and others alike to retrace the two-way experience of horror called slave trade in Ghana. The trail and supporting structures, institutions, and enabling locations will represent, using Gan’s (2015) terms, a “Sacred Ground Memorial” trail, a “Site of Conscience,” what I term a “Trail of Conscience,” a route that is the witness of the history of utmost human rights abuse. Perhaps it will further promote dialog and acknowledgement of and about modern-day anguish from slavery’s past. The route could provide space for contemplation, reflection, reconciliation, and healing for particularly descendants and relatives of slaves domestically and from the diaspora. That would put it in similar category with other horrors of humanity and places like Auschwitz Historic Site where many European Jews were systematically killed. The makeup of the route experience will include sites, interpretative programs, and



research facilities that can be managed or coordinated by the Ghana Museum and Monument Board (GMMB), and associated institutions of higher learning. Notably, it is possibly that not all the sites along the route will be open to the public due to concerns about their and artifacts fragility, sensitive nature, or sustainability challenges.

Developments in genealogy and consequent interest by slave descendants to find “where they actually came from,” their ancestral home, has made it very necessary to recreate and conserve this slave trade route, as well as, the many others within Ghana and in other countries bordering the West African coastline. Critics may argue that conserving this one route is cherry-picking, and the wrong way to go about conserving slavery assets. The Ghana slave trade is not confined to this one route; it is just the initial one among others that should be conserved, including support networks and institutions that the slave traders and dealers utilized, such as hold-over locations, markets, and many encampments in the surrounding communities along the route that together comprises the geography of slave trade in Ghana.

What is at Stake: Takeaways

Ghana and her history of slave trade, domestic and Trans-Atlantic, the slave trade routes, and support structures and institutions risk being downplayed, concealed, and forgotten, if not sustainably conserved. It is the heritage, for whatever it represents. The obscurity of most aspects of the slave trade apart from the few export “castles” along Ghana’s Atlantic coast, and a few other locations inland that has been preserved for tourism underscore the larger

failure to reckon with the peculiar system, that is the network of slavery past. Ghana and her complicity with slavery is unlike any aspect of her history in the extent to which it permeated the bloodlines of her people with the conquered and the conqueror mixed bloodlines. Presently, there is not a comprehensive effort to conserve and fully recreate the physical aspects of the slave trade infrastructure, the experience, the horrors of this sordid past, to the extent that captures and duplicates the trail networks, the locations, centers, and institutions that were complicit, at least as a geo-tourism asset that could raise additional revenue, and for local and regional development catalyst. Conserving the Paga to Elmina and Cape Coast slave trade route is an effort to showcase the chain, recreate the experience of the enslaved as they are carted away to unfamiliar destinations, and particularly the development potential of many communities it portends. It will also reflect the higher priority by GMMB to be comprehensive in efforts to recreate a story, a heritage that is worth conserving for posterity.

The emphasis to develop the two-way direction of the slave trade route bodes well for significant economic and physical development potential that could have huge potential for local communities along the route and regionally too. Further, the various opportunities for education, research, conservation, and sustainable environmental development, including as a testament to humanities inhumanity to others. This experience must not be experienced again; never again.

References

- BBC News. (March 26, 2007). Americans follow African slave trail. Retrieved May 12, 2016 from news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Africa/6486827.stm
- Gan, V. (2015). America’s failure to preserve historic slave markets. Retrieved February 13, 2015 from http://www.citylab.com/politics/2015/02/americas-failure-to-preserve-historic-slave-markets/385367/?utm_source=nl_daily_link6_021315
- NPS (National Park Service), (2016). Aboard the Underground Railroad: A national register of historic places travel itinerary. Retrieved May 12, 2016 from <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/>
- Perbi, A.A. (2007). *A history of indigenous slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Century*. Accra, Ghana: Sub-Sahara Publishers
- Underground Railroad Routes. (2016). Retrieved May 12, 2016 from <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-AmTdwUEfocw/USOs-JSCKdI/AAAAAAAAANw/k904Oh7PNyM/s1600/underground+rr+map.jpg>