

Caribbean grave illumines slavery

CHARLOTTE AMALIE, U.S. Virgin Islands (AP) - A paper trail documents their lives as human property, from their passage across the Atlantic to their sale as slaves for sugar plantations. Now a newly discovered burial ground promises to shed extensive new light on the lives and deaths of Africans in the Caribbean.

Researchers from Den-

mark and the U.S. Virgin Islands want to unearth up to 50 skeletons next year, hoping to learn about their diet, illnesses and causes of death, and thus broaden knowledge of slave life in the one-time Danish colony.

Descendants of slaves could discover ancestors through DNA tests. At public meetings, islanders have also embraced the excava-

tions as a way for Europeans to recognize their historic role in the slave trade — and perhaps to make new amends.

Most slaves in the Americas were buried in unmarked graves, and studies of slave graveyards “are rarer than hen’s teeth,” said David Brewer, an archaeologist with the U.S. Virgin Islands government and one of the

scientists planning to unearth some tombs in November to assess their condition before the project starts in March. “The science that will come out of it will just be extraordinary,” Brewer said.

The slaves are buried in shallow graves beneath mounds of stones and conch shells, some marked by small, illegible headstones. They were found this year on

a private 300-acre estate on St. Croix, the largest island.

Details have been withheld while researchers negotiate access to the property, said Brewer, who refused to identify the owner or the exact location of the graveyard.

The scientists will examine teeth and bones and conduct chemical analysis in a mobile laboratory. Brewer stressed that the bones will be disturbed as little as possible and reburied exactly as they were found.

One fingernail-sized shaving will be taken from each skeleton for a database of African DNA that could reveal links to other slave populations.

“This is the closest we can possibly get to telling the story of their lives as they knew it,” said Pia Bennike, an anthropologist leading the team from the University of Copenhagen.

More than 100,000 enslaved Africans, mostly from what is now Ghana, arrived in the Danish West Indies from 1617 to 1807, according to Myron Jackson, director of the U.S. Virgin Islands’ historical preservation office. Many were sold at slave markets and shipped to the American colonies, while thousands remained as the property of Danish colonists.

From the time they were big enough to work, slaves cut sugar cane and picked cotton, tobacco and sweet potatoes in the Caribbean heat, Jackson said.

When severe drought hit in 1725 and 1733, some plantation owners starved their work force rather than pay for food to be shipped to the

islands. David Brion Davis, a Yale University historian, notes that Caribbean slaves died much faster than those on the mainland and had a lower birthrate because of the harsh environment and labor conditions.

“Sugar production was a very, very taxing — almost lethal — kind of occupation,” he said, noting that many lost limbs in machines.

Slaves who plotted revolt, tried to escape or threatened a White man were punished by 150 lashes, brandings on their forehead, or having a leg or ear chopped off. Others were hanged or tortured to death.

The Danes outlawed slavery in 1848. The United States bought the three-island territory from Denmark in 1917.

An island group is hoping the project will boost its case for reparations from Denmark.

No demands for compensation have ever been made. But educating Europeans about their role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade will likely lead to more Danish investment and possible payments, said Shelley Moorhead, president of the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance, based in St. Croix.

Historian Davis said he is particularly interested in whether the genetic testing shows how often Blacks and Whites interbred.

He said the study holds great potential. “There are probably gaps we don’t even know about that will be filled in.”

Libya AIDS verdict issued soon

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) - Five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor accused of infecting hundreds of Libyan children with AIDS addressed a court hearing their retrial for the first time on Saturday, reiterating their innocence.

The judge set a verdict date for Dec. 19 in the case, which has drawn international protests and accusations that Libya concocted the charges to cover up poor hygiene conditions at its hos-

pitals. The six held in Libya since 1999 were previously convicted on the same charges and handed death sentences in 2004. Libya’s Supreme Court ordered a new trial last year after international criticism.

All the defendants deny the accusations.

“No doctor or nurse would dare commit such a dreadful crime,” said one of the jailed nurses, Cristiana Valcheva, adding that she

sympathized with the victims and their families.

Valentina Siropulo, another defendant, appealed to the judges not to sentence her to death. “I have never done anything illegal, and I can’t imagine such a tragic end to my life,” the Bulgarian nurse said. “Since I arrived in Libya, I’ve spent only six months working as a nurse and the rest of the time in prison,” she said.

At least 50 of the 400 children infected at the hospital

where the nurses and the doctor worked have since died. More than 300 are undergoing treatment in Europe.

A French AIDS expert has testified that HIV was rife in the hospital because of poor hygiene.

The defense has urged the court to review the “pressure” brought to bear on the defendants after their arrest. Amnesty International has said the defendants reported being tortured with electric shocks and beaten until they confessed.

“Bruises and torture marks are still on my body,” said Ashraf al-Hazouz, the detained Palestinian doctor. He told the court on Saturday that when he was first captured, his family went 10 months without news from him.

The defense argued that the defendants have already been jailed seven years and should be freed pending a verdict. But the prosecution countered that they might be harmed by the victims’ relatives, and the judge on Saturday ruled against their release.

Violence against women is a global phenomenon

By Saeed Shabazz
Special to Sentinel-Voice
UNITED NATIONS (NNPA) - A new study by the United Nations on all forms of violence against women, finds that, in all nations of the world, violence against women persists as a pervasive scourge, endangering women’s lives and violating their rights. The study, under the auspices of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, says that such violence also impoverishes families and communities, drains government resources and restricts economic development.

“Violence against women has yet to receive the priority attention and resources needed, in order to address the issue with the necessary seriousness and visibility,” stated Annan when the study was released at UN headquarters,” he added.

The UN study put forward a blueprint for action by nations and intergovernmental bodies, including UN bodies, towards preventing and eliminating violence against women. The 140-page report, according to Human Rights Watch, “confirms that violence against women by spouses, family members and employers is a human rights violation.” The UN report states, to end impunity

and prevent violence, nations must: secure gender equality and protect women’s human rights; exercise leadership to end violence against women; close the gaps between international standards and national laws, policies and practices; and allocate adequate resources and funding.

“Today, far too many women are subjected to violence and made to feel ashamed. The real shame belongs to a world that often blames women for the crimes committed against them, and allows such widespread violence to continue,” stated Thoraya Obaid, under secretary-general and executive director of the UN Population Fund.

“The secretary-general’s study conveys a very simple message,” said LaShawn Jefferson, executive director of HRW’s Women’s Rights Division, in a press release. “The individual who carries out any form of violence against women has committed a crime.” Another international report on violence against women by a UN organization was released at the same time. The report, issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), used data gathered through interviews of 25,000 women in 10

nations. According to WHO, the rates of partner violence ranged from a low of 15 percent in Yokohama, Japan, to a high of 71 percent in rural Ethiopia.

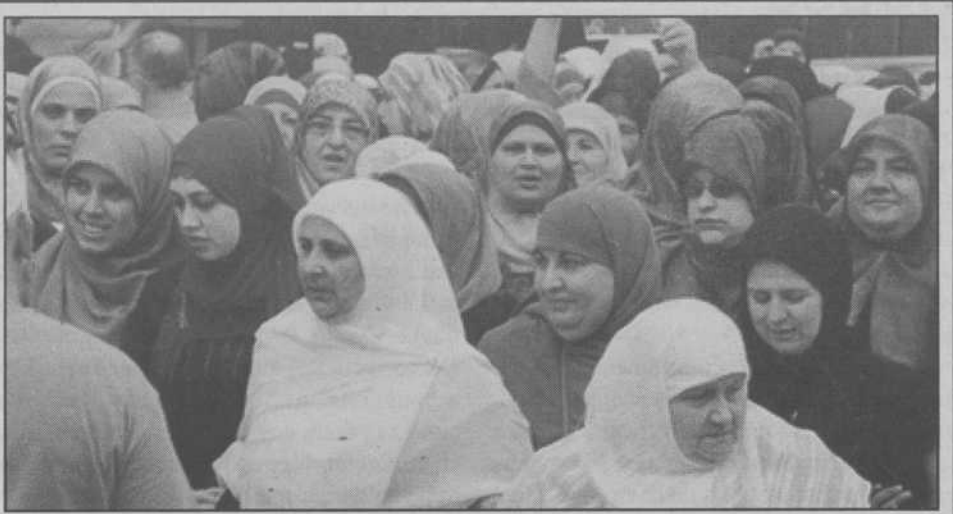
The findings were published in *The Lancet*, a medical journal published in London. “Violence by an intimate partner is a common experience worldwide,” wrote the report’s authors.

Researchers say that previous studies focused mainly on developed nations such as the United States. For the study, 1,500 interviews were conducted in places such as Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia, Thailand and Tanzania.

According to data, the rate of abuse by partner in the European Union is estimated between 20 to 25 percent.

According to *The New York Times*, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in their national surveys, report that 25 percent of women say that they have been physically- or sexually-assaulted by a spouse, partner or date. Nearly 5 million women are the victims of domestic violence every year in the U.S., according to MSNBC.com.

Saeed Shabazz writes for the *Final Call*.



WOMEN UNDER COVER

Female worshippers prepare to leave the Lakemba Mosque in Sydney following Friday prayers, last week. Sheik Taj Aldin al-Hilali, the musti of Australia since 1989, apologized Friday for any offense he caused by saying during a sermon that women were soldiers of Satan and comparing women who don’t wear headscarves to ‘uncovered meat’ who invite rape. However, al-Hilali has defied demands for him to stand down, insisting he was misinterpreted, and calls by Prime Minister John Howard and other outraged politicians for the Muslim community to remove him from his post have been ignored.