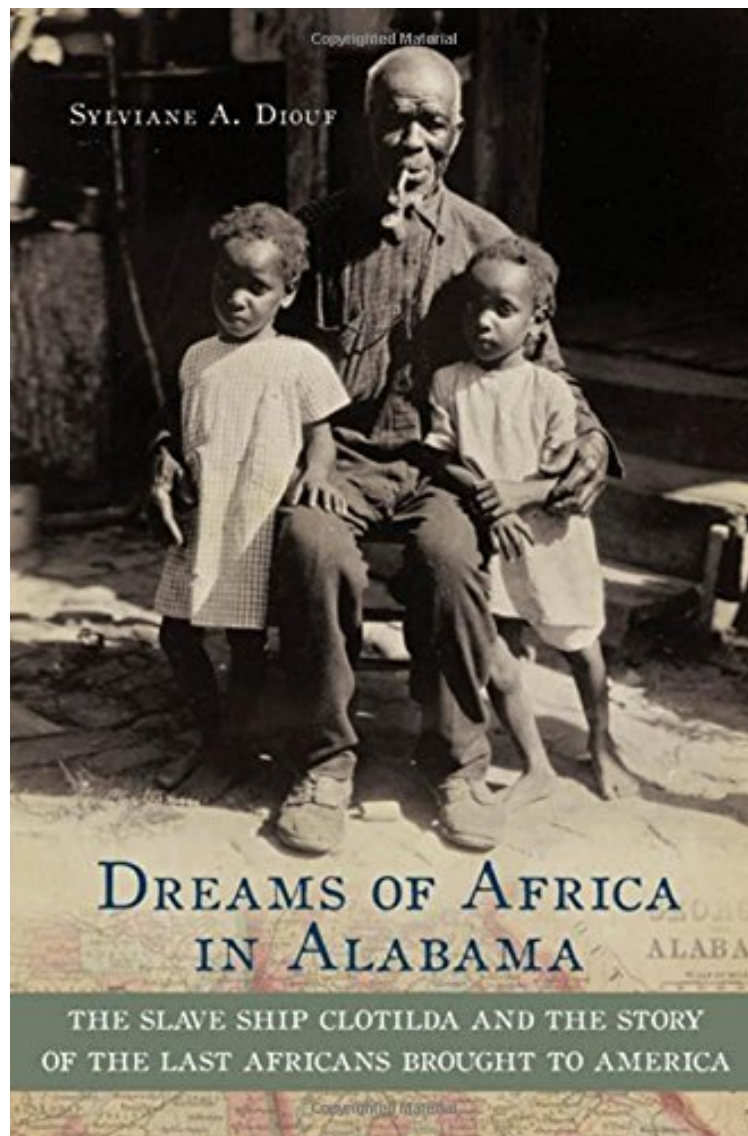


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Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America

Sylviane A. Diouf

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In the summer of 1860, more than fifty years after the United States legally abolished the international slave trade, 110 men, women, and children from Benin and Nigeria were brought ashore in Alabama under cover of night. They were the last recorded group of Africans deported to the United States as slaves. Timothy Meaher, an established Mobile businessman, sent the slave ship, the *Clotilda*, to Africa, on a bet that he could "bring a shipful of niggers right into Mobile Bay under the officers' noses." He won the bet. This book reconstructs the lives of the people in West Africa, recounts their capture and passage in the slave pen in Ouidah, and describes their experience of slavery alongside American-born enslaved men and women. After emancipation, the group reunited from various plantations, bought land, and founded their own settlement, known as African Town. They ruled it according to customary African laws, spoke their own regional language and, when giving interviews, insisted that writers use their African names so that their families would know that they were still alive. The last survivor of the *Clotilda* died in 1935, but African Town is still home to a community of *Clotilda* descendants. The publication of *Dreams of Africa in Alabama* marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Winner of the Wesley-Logan Prize of the American Historical Association (2007)

From Booklist*Starred * At a time when international slave trade had been outlawed and civil discord on the broader issue of slavery was brewing, an Alabama businessman took up a bet that he could bring slaves from Africa in open defiance of local officials. In the summer of 1860, he did just that with the slave ship *Clotilda*, bringing back 110 men, women, and children from Dahomey, sneaking them in among the already existing slave community. In this fascinating book, Diouf details how the last enslaved Africans to be brought to the U.S. were integrated into American slave culture and how they fared five years later, after emancipation. When their efforts to return to the west coast of Africa failed, the Africans founded their own settlement, which came to be known as Africatown. They managed to maintain their language, customs, and social structures into the twenty-first century, though the last survivor of the *Clotilda* died in 1935. Timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, this book will appeal to readers interested in the retention of African culture by enslaved black Americans. Vanessa BushCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "An exceedingly well and creatively researched study that greatly contributes to the fields of slavery and African American history."--H-Net"This important contribution provides readers with the opportunity to consider African culture, its survival even under slavery, its sense of community with roots in West Africa, and the difficulties of maintaining community in a segregated and increasingly Jim Crow South in the late 19th century. Highly recommended."--T.F. Armstrong, CHOICE"A compelling and often tragic narrative of survival and adaptation. It makes it clear that the Atlantic slave trade was not only a part of a 'distant' history of the United States, but that it also continued to shape our country long after it was officially abolished two centuries ago."--Lisa A. Lindsay, African Studies "Diouf's book makes a significant contribution to the history of race and identity in Alabama and the Atlantic world."--Timothy R. Buckner, The Journal of Southern History"Extremely well-documented work that breathes life into the African Diaspora."--Debra Newman Ham, The Journal of African American History"Dreams of Africa in Alabama is more than a gripping slave story. Few historians have succeeded to the extent that Diouf has in presenting a fully fleshed picture of the experience of Africans negotiating life in America...A valuable and impressive addition to the literature of slavery and emancipation in American history."--Donna L. Cox, Southern Historian"Diouf's masterful storytelling, thorough research, and deft handling of the body of sometimes-conflicting sources bring the story to light and effectively set the record straight."--Journal of American History"A major contribution to pan-African and Black trans-Atlantic studies...Dreams of Africa in Alabama reads as a novel, yet it is the product of rigorous research..."--Sylvie Kande, QBR: The Black Book "Diouf immerses the reader in the diversity and complexity of Africa...The narrative is patient, disciplined, compelling, and brave, never shying away from the central role that Africans played in the enslavement of other Africans...One puts down this compelling book convinced both of the significance of the Africans at the center of it, and that Diouf has given us a superb history."--Eric Love, Civil War Book "This remarkable story of how a group of captured Africans were torn from their native land in the kingdom of Dahomey, transported across the Atlantic Ocean to Mobile, Alabama shortly before the Civil War, and struggled to recapture their former lives by creating an African town during the postwar era, offers a unique perspective on American history. The narrative is at once tragic, uplifting, and engrossing."--Loren Schweninger, co-author of *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South*"An amazing story! Diouf shows how the African captives on the last American slave ship not only survived slavery, the civil war, and reconstruction in Alabama, but also fought to preserve African memories, culture, and community. The

exhaustive research and graceful writing of Sylviane Diouf has brought this epic journey to life."--Robert Harms, author of *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade*"In a tale worthy of a novelist, Sylviane Diouf provides a well-researched, nicely written, and moving account of the last slave ship to America, whose 110 captives arrived in Mobile in 1860 and, after the war, created their dream of Africa in Alabama and called it Africa Town."--Howard Jones, author of *Mutiny on the Amistad*"Without question, this is the richest narration of the history of the last set of African slaves who came to the United States. The book carefully illustrates how they they were able to construct a semi-independent existence, navigating the treacherous experience of bondage during the Civil War years and of the constricted freedom that followed. Not only do we gain access to precious, invaluable details about how the marginalized made their own history, we receive additional profound knowledge of the process through which African practices were retained."--Toyin Falola, University of Texas, and Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters"Dreams of Africa in Alabama is an excellent example of the new scholarship on the African diaspora that reconstructs the individual life stories of enslaved Africans--in this case the people brought from West Africa to Alabama in 1860 on the *Clotilda*. Diouf has sensitively revealed how these people built on their shared misfortune in being enslaved to form the vibrant community of African Town in the midst of an increasingly racist society, a testimony to unshakeable memories of their African homelands."--Paul E. Lovejoy, Harriet Tubman Research Institute, York University"Dreams of Africa in Alabama stands as a moving memorial to the indomitable spirit of a small group of Africans who managed to maintain their dignity and their humanity on an unfamiliar and often hostile shore."--Mobile Press-Register"Dreams of Africa in Alabama is more than a gripping slave story. Few historians have succeeded to the extent that Diouf has in presenting a fully fleshed picture of the experience of Africans negotiating life in America...A valuable and impressive addition to the literature of slavery and emancipation in American history."--Donna L. Cox, *Southern Historian*"Dreams of Africa in Alabama is an extraordinarily well-written historical account...where the reader will find horror, sorrow and courage, coupled with a sensational resilience to the harsh conditions which the African slaves endured."--*The Northern Mariner*"One of the most illuminating aspects of Diouf's study is her elucidation of the *Clotilda* Africans' often troubled relationships with African-Americans."--*Journal of Social History*About the AuthorSylviane A. Diouf is an award-winning author of books on African and African diaspora history and culture. She has taught at *Libreville University* and *New York University* and is currently a curator at the *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture* in New York.