



Memories of Madagascar and Slavery in the Black Atlantic (Ohio RIS Global Series)

Wendy Wilson-Fall

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“This innovative study marries two very divergent sources of knowledge—historical documentation from the era of the slave trade with the narratives of remembrance of ancestors from the present—to reveal a compelling story that links Madagascar with colonial North America and the struggles of the descendants of Malagasy immigrants to retain an identity that was endangered through slavery.”

—Paul E. Lovejoy, Distinguished Research Professor, York University

From the seventeenth century into the nineteenth, thousands of Madagascar’s people were brought to American ports as slaves. In *Memories of Madagascar and Slavery in the Black Atlantic*, Wendy Wilson-Fall shows that the descendants of these Malagasy slaves in the United States maintained an ethnic identity in ways that those from the areas more commonly feeding the Atlantic slave trade did not. Generations later, hundreds, if not thousands, of African Americans maintain strong identities as Malagasy descendants, yet the histories of Malagasy slaves, sailors, and their descendants have been little explored.

Wilson-Fall examines how and why the stories that underlie this identity have been handed down through families?—?and what this says about broader issues of ethnicity and meaning-making for those whose family origins, if documented at all, have been willfully obscured by history.

By analyzing contemporary oral histories as well as historical records and examining the conflicts between the two, Wilson-Fall carefully probes the tensions between the official and the personal, the written and the lived. She suggests that historically, the black community has been a melting pot to which generations of immigrants?—?enslaved and free?—?have been socially assigned, often in spite of their wish to retain far more complex identities. Innovative in its methodology and poetic in its articulation, this book bridges history and ethnography to take studies of diaspora, ethnicity, and identity into new territory.

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