This project traces the journey of one nation of Africans into slavery in the Americas. In 1730, the Akwamu Empire, in present-day Ghana, West Africa, suffered a terrible collapse. Rival African armies from Akim and Fante enslaved thousands of Akwamu subjects and sold them to European slavers on the Gold Coast. The Akwamu later led the first island-wide slave revolt in the western hemisphere in St. John, USVI, in 1733. The goal of the project is to identify the most likely landing places of the Akwamu people in the western hemisphere following their forced migration into the Americas from 1729 to 1733. The Akwamu rebels on St. John were supposedly looking for their people on other islands. Where were they?

Methodology

This study relied upon the “Transatlantic Slave Trade Database,” a collaborative digital data-set that compiles records of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Using this data, we identified European slave ships most likely to have carried enslaved Akwamu people into the ports of the Americas. We limited our search by date (1730-1733) and location (Gold Coast Ports east of Dutch Elmina, based on landed slaving routes). Slave ship entries do not list the names of passengers nor their nation, so we cannot know the exact number of Akwamu aboard each vessel.

Outcomes

• The Akwamu rebels on St. John would have found many of their people in neighboring islands if they spread their rebellion.
  • The most likely locations would be British owned islands like, Antigua, Nevis, Montserrat, and St. Kitts all located to the south of St. John, or Jamaica to the west, or French owned Saint Domingue [Haiti].
  • To our surprise, no Akwamu were taken to mainland North America between 1730-1733, so the Akwamu diaspora was confined to the Caribbean and South America. If the Akwamu had been able to secure boats, as they tried to do, they might have raised their African nation in the New World.

References

Gardelin to Vestindisk-Guinesk Sammenslutning [VVG], January 1st, 1734, Breve og Dokumenter for Vestindien, Danish National Archiv, Copenhagen.

