

*“Comparative Black History Collection”*

Matthew Whitaker

As a graduate student in the Comparative Black History Ph.D. Program here at Michigan State University, and an avid reader of Black Diaspora history, I endeavor to understand the historical experiences of people of African descent in Africa and throughout the Western hemisphere. In order to relieve my thirst for comparative black history, and to prepare myself for a career as a specialist in this field of inquiry, I have assembled a collection of books which reflect my interest. This collection, including biographies, anthologies, traditional historical monographs, encyclopedias, textbooks, and children's books, include many signed first edition cloth publications. Thematically, my collection documents the intricately connected yet distinct black cultures of a plethora of disparate societies. In this way the series explores the myriad ways that culture, ideology, and racial politics both distinguish and unite the experiences, reactions, and conditions of African peoples in different parts of the "New World". My goal in reading and building my collection of comparative black history, is to prepare myself to conduct innovative research, prepare instructive lectures, and provide service to historians who practice public history and public service with a specialization in African, African-American, Caribbean and/or Latin American history. My collection provides general exposure to the whole range of themes and methods in comparative black history, and promotes the development of an ability to teach and think comparatively.

My comparative black series examines the fascinating documents and historiography on people of African descent in African, the Caribbean, North America, South American, and other regions of the world from the thirteenth century A.D. to contemporary times. It focuses largely on the enslavement and emancipation of Africans in the diaspora. Specific topics of discussion include the African background (pre-1500 A.D.), the Atlantic slave trade, the nature of slavery, life and labor, resistance, the transition to freedom, identity, the social construction of race, gender, religion, and artistic expression. Selected countries, including the United States, Brazil, Angola, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Mexico, Antigua, Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica, provide the locus for many of the studies, and the basis for illuminating comparisons. Examining the intersection of race, class, and gender in the context of African slavery, the Atlantic slave trade, the middle passage, "New World" slavery, creolization, culture, consciousness, and resistance in the Black Diaspora, enables me, and those who share in my collection, to develop an appreciation for the major themes and conversations pertaining to people of African descent.

It must be noted that my books are not simply rooted fixtures on my bookshelves. Rather, they constitute what I call living history. A living history which must be disseminated if we are to learn from our failures and our successes. To this end, I utilize my collection regularly to provide material for various reading groups, undergraduates, my wife's elementary school, and anyone else interested in learning about Black Diaspora history. Indeed, withstanding the personal gratification I receive from reading and collecting,

assisting others in the learning process is often as liberating and gratifying as reading itself.