



**St Croix: A History of Sweeping Labor
Concentration
Connections and Consequences**

Two important pieces of social science fieldwork have been undertaken this summer on St. Croix. Ayana Omilade Flewellen is an archaeologist from the University of California, Riverside and as a founding member of the Society of Black Archaeologists has been guiding first-year college students enrolled in Historically Black Colleges and Universities in exposing them to hands-on participation in archaeological excavations.

Since 2016, Flewellen and others have been leading excavations at Estate Little Princess, which is under the stewardship of the Nature Conservancy. The village of this former plantation has existed for over 200 years. Since the mid-eighteenth century until the 1960s, these cut- coral stone structures have served as residential housing for the workers of this property.

Since the 1960s, when the growing of sugar was curtailed as a non-viable export crop, inhabitants still resided in the structures but worked outside the estate (perhaps at Harvey and Hess). Flewellen states that the student archaeologists through their reading of historical accounts are well-prepared to find eighteenth and nineteenth century artifacts (household articles). Yet, they are surprised at the number of 1930s bottles which they are unearthing!

The archaeologists invited twenty UVI students of different interests to visit the site as well as members from the Boys and Girls' Club so that they would gain a greater appreciation of both VI History and the social science of an archaeological interpretation of the past.

The project is funded by Smithsonian Institute's Slave Wrecks Project and the National Park Service Exhibit on Enslavement. The Little Princess dig is a terrestrial site within that joint program.

Before the digging began, members of the team conducted historical research through a host of diverse records such as property tax lists, censuses, and family albums. George Tyson, territorial historian, assisted them by providing background information of the

estate. From the Data Population Base compiled by the VI Social History Associates, he listed the names of residents of the estate from 1841-1911.

“When one hears the history of an estate, one clearly hears the history of the men who occupied the space. To get to the lives of the women, one has to ferret out their activities that are not as prevalent in the history,” states Flewellen. No matter what phase of Virgin Islands history we are talking about, people are still talking about men in the past and the concept of the past is still male.”

Both Flewellen and Poblete are concerned with the same concepts. Both are studying industrial societies: plantation, oil refining, and storage terminals. All three of these Federally- supported industries have had a large influx of men in a short space of time. Flewellen explains, “With a heavy influx of males from other places, there is the concern of the rise of the sex exploitation of African-Crucian women. This may manifest itself in an overt manner in the lack of affordable and accessible housing or in the hidden social injustices such as sexual assault or manipulation.”

Jo Anna Poblete, an associate professor of history at Claremont Graduate University, California, studies the invisibility of people in industries under the US rule, especially that of the unincorporated territories.

Her first book deals with Filipino and Puerto Rican migrants to the sugar industry in Hawai'i when it was also still a territory; her second looks at the tuna fish canning workers in American Samoa, and her current interest centers on the impacts of Hess Oil Refinery on everyday people of St. Croix. She emphasizes that this industrial history is part and parcel with that of the island's unincorporated status. Poblete, however, is not simply writing the history of the refinery, as others have done.

Poblete says, “I desire to connect the creation of the industry to Federal and territorial incentives for economic development. I am especially looking at the loopholes that give corporations advantages that directly affect workers and their families. In her three case studies of peoples in unincorporated territories, there are indigenous practices which coincide and clash with US rule.”

For example, in American Samoa, indigenous ways of decision-making are more extensive than the US Federal window in which stakeholders have to respond to a proposal. “ This is a time period in which the Federal government believes it has done its due diligence, but for local communities, planning takes at least one year's time. Thus, circumstances surrounding the timing of policy development may not be enough for the local community,” she explains.

Public outcries against corporate power, in the form of activism, bring attention to the impacts of unincorporated status. Often voices of resistance come from female community leaders, whether as activists, researchers, cultural producers, doctors, nurses, politicians, attorneys, and educators, or women connected to these industrie's highlights

health impacts, family concerns, and marginalized people. These voices which can also raise the group consciousness of all the stakeholders in the project.

In speaking together, the two scholars reconstructed negotiations of the late 1960s. Governor Ralph Paiewonsky had brought together Lawrence Harvey to start an alumina factory and Leon Hess, an oil refinery. From the moment of inception to the acquisition of thousands of acres of land on the south shore of St. Croix to accommodate these two businesses, the owner Annie de Chabert Clarke was the powerhouse at the center of the negotiations.

Sixty years later, we are still studying these connections and consequences.

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