

## TRANSCRIPT

“Noble Desire: A Time for Healing”

(Motion Picture)

It started with one man’s desire to do the right thing: apologize. How could he make amends for 400 years of forgotten brutality and savagery? How could he show to the African diaspora just how deep his country was involved in their past? He decided to reveal the truth - all of it. His country supported him. Three Americans allowed this man and his country to show them a forgotten history. What they found changed their world. Through an African confession one man and his country sought an international pardon.

*"If these waters could talk, what a story they would tell? Thousands of slaves that left those shores, but never made it across"*

*"As an African in the United States, I can more, in a better way empathy with what the African American is going through; the very agony that has been passed on from generation to generation."*

*"The first time I was made aware, that Africans actually sold Africans."*

*"All of my life I heard about the slave trade. I never knew that Africans played a part in the slave trade until just recently. I mean, it seems that that portion of the picture was left out."*

*"I am a white person. I didn't know about how many families who were enslaved, but the emotion overwhelmed me to realize that we had a holocaust. We had 3.6 million Africans send in ships."*

*"Without our help I don't think it would be so easy for Europeans so please forgive us and let's come back home."*

'Home' is the smallest African country of Benin. 400 years ago Benin was known as Dahomey. Its boundaries were broader and its influence reached all over West Africa. The seed of its power was in Abomey.

*"The Ashanti kingdom and Dahomey were the two major territories; ... even though they traded other items, ... they were more based on the slave trade particularly in the 18th century and nearly 19th century than in any other West African territories."*

It proved very lucrative for the kings and it solidified Benin's powerful presence on the African Continent. From the 15th to the 19th centuries Benin was known as the slave capital of the world.

*"There was first of all for much of its time particularly in the 18th century a tributary state to another area called Oyo. But it largely had its own control over the slave trade, I think from 1727, its operations in the port city of Ouidah. And this became one of the, I hate to say, best organized but let's say most efficient slave trade operations of all. What is unusual about this whole episode, is probably one the actual enormity of it. The fact that here we are talking about millions of people within a circumscribed period of time of this century. Secondly we also probably focus on the extreme brutality and the dehumanization."*

They brought their Voodoo belief system into the business. They designed the slave operation to not only break down the cap to Africans physically but also spiritually.

*"Thirdly I like to think about how indeed the sort of slave trade engendered lot about this which we come to know as modern racial ideas. It is not that racial ideas began with the slave trade but whatever ideas did exist, the slave trade accelerate to this ideas, emphasized them."*

This truth let President Mathieu Kerekou to a noble desire: reveal the entire truth about Benin's role in the slave trade and then seek forgiveness from the African diaspora. In December of 1999 Kerekou convened a reconciliation conference and invited the slave trading nations, European and African to join him. They did.

*"Let me once again before you, say on behalf of our people I am sorry, we are for the misdeeds, for the past."*

*"I also want to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the white Americans..... .. as far as the ancestors of white American and white European, I ask on their behalf to the ancestors of black American, the in grief, total and divine forgiveness which I ask of today once and for all."*

*"... .. How do I as a white European begin to speak on behalf of the tens of millions to have perpetrated the slave trade over those 350 years, ... (sobbing) ... when we repent and we confess our sin and we ask your forgiveness for the abomination we, through our forefathers, have inflicted upon you our beloved brothers and sisters."*

*President Kerekou: "I owe you the truth and the truth is made clear the theme of this conference. The theme is reconciliation and development. The way of development does not appear in the theme because I am from a poor country. It does not appear because of what I've gone through in my life. It does not appear because we want money. I think what it is very, very important for me at this conference is reconciliation. And if we, because I am also the president of the poor in this country, and if we were to put development before reconciliation I am sure of one thing, God will not bless such a development. That is why the most important thing for me was this pardon, this forgiveness that we needed from you."*

It all began with the ceremony of flag raising over the city of Baton Rouge this started the historic visit of the Benin ambassador Cyrille S. Oguin to Louisiana. He came to Baton Rouge to give a formal apology to the Louisiana Community on the behalf of his government and people for his country historical role in the slave trade, the ambassador spend the last weekend of June 2003 with political, business, community, religious and educational leaders shearing a message of forgiveness.

*"I ask of you now, to forgive my ancestors for the horrible deeds of selling your ancestors into slavery."*

It was a historic event an African ambassador apologizing for slavery. Why? Between the 16th and 19th centuries Benin was notorious for selling an estimated 12 Million Africans to the Europeans. It was known as the slave capital of the world. In 1999 the president of Benin wanted to make amends and offered an apology to the African diaspora during a reconciliation conference. He then gave a mandate to his ambassadors to bring that message to the diaspora. RADCORP is organizing tour stops across the nation to bring this message of forgiveness to the African diaspora in America. Baton Rouge was the first stop. At the Friday evening banquet the ambassador began with the apology.

*"In that spirit of reconciliation, I ask of you all now to forgive my ancestors for the horrible deeds of selling your ancestors into slavery."*

*"Never once I have ever heard anyone actually take responsibility yet alone offering apologize for slavery."*

*"When there is a need for reconciliation, never to say I am sorry. But rather say forgive me, because the person you asked for forgiveness has to make a choice of saying I do or I don't."*

*"At first it took me little by surprise. I mean, is something you never really think about in that context. You always think of the slave trade has been purely been a European phenomena. You don't think about the reciprocal side of the transaction and how involved Africa might has been and getting 12 million bodies from Africa to the rest of the world. So from that standpoint it was pretty surprising."*

This reconciliation tour was not just about forgiveness. It also promoted opportunities to business communities, as well as highlighted a cross road program to reconnect African Americans with Africans called 'adopt a village'. After reaching out to the business community the ambassador visited 3 churches on Sunday to bring the message of forgiveness to the congregation.

(Prayer: "In the name of Jesus...")

"To be here together our faith is intertwined there is no way to separate for long. Please forgive us."

Weeping Woman with short gray hair and a purple suit - *"There was one story in particular I remember...I had a great, great grandmother who always wept. She went to her grave always wondering whatever happened to her sister who was separated from her and raised as white... But, I feel such a release..."*

*"For me history is two words: "His Story". And what we are doing, we are writing the story of God about a black race. Gods Story about us. We are another step in this story. And we are, I call it a grace, to be part as a worker to write this story. God's story about humankind, especially about black race."*

Ambassador Oguin is scheduled to do more of these tour stops throughout this year. RADCORP is organizing the tour and more information on upcoming cities visits will be found on his website <http://www.radcorp.org/enroll.html> reporting from Baton Rouge.  
Andora Williams.

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