

also known as Sally Smith, was the second-to-last living African-born survivor of U.S. slavery. She was born in present-day Benin on the west coast of Africa. Redoshi was one of around 110 West African children and young people who comprised the human cargo of the schooner *Clotilda*, the last slave ship to reach the United States. The *Clotilda* docked in Mobile Bay, Alabama, in July 1860, fifty-two years after a federal law had been enacted that banned the importation of slaves to the country. Redoshi outlived all other known *Clotilda* survivors with the exception of Matilda McCrear, who died in January 1940. Another *Clotilda* survivor, KOSSOLA/CUDJO LEWIS, died in 1935. Little is known about Redoshi's early life, although a newspaper article suggested that she was the daughter-in-law of a chief and that her father upheld the law in her community (*Montgomery Advertiser*, 31 January 1932). The precise pronunciation and meaning of Redoshi's birth name are unknown. However, her descriptions of her kidnapping by Dahomean slave traders indicate that, like many of her fellow *Clotilda* survivors, she was a member of a Yoruba community that was raided on or around 16 February 1860.

King Glele of Dahomey led the raid on Redoshi's town. Glele's father, King Ghezo, had signed a treaty with Great Britain in 1852 that formally abolished the export of slaves overseas. However, a decline in the price of palm oil and resurgence of the Cuban slave trade meant that an overt trade in slaves soon resumed within the West African kingdom. When Ghezo died in 1858, Glele expanded his father's slave raiding campaigns. Redoshi claimed that the Dahomean warriors who kidnapped her wet her town's gunpowder to ensure that the community could not defend itself before launching a surprise night attack. The survivors of the raid were then marched to the slave port of Ouidah. Redoshi suggested that this journey took four days. The captives were then locked for three weeks in a slave pen, or barracoon, alongside other raid survivors and kidnap victims before being selected for sale to the U.S. for \$100 each.

The *Clotilda*'s Canadian-born captain, William Foster, purchased the captives. Foster was acting on behalf of Mobile-based plantation owner and shipbuilder Timothy Meaher, who allegedly had bet a substantial sum that he could smuggle a boatload of Africans across the Atlantic without being caught. The voyage from West Africa to Mobile lasted for around forty-five days. Redoshi asserted that at least two people died from sickness on board the ship and were subsequently thrown out to sea. On arrival in Mobile the *Clotilda* survivors were smuggled upriver in an effort to conceal their illegal purchase and journey from U.S. authorities. The schooner was burned and sunk; remains of the *Clotilda* were finally identified at the bottom of the Mobile River in May 2019.

Most of the *Clotilda* survivors were enslaved to the Meaher family and stayed in Mobile. Timothy Meaher took sixteen males and sixteen females, ten "couples" went to one of his brothers, Burns, and eight people were sent to another brother, James. Thomas Buford, a friend of the Meahers, acquired six or seven slaves and Foster received between five and eight "couples." These groups of men and women managed to reunite after the Civil War. They purchased land from their former owners and created their own community, known as African Town and later Africatown, the first U.S. town to be run continuously by black people and the only one founded by Africans. However, Redoshi, her husband, Yawith, and at least two other Africans were sent to Bank of Selma founder Washington Smith's

plantation in Bogue Chitto, Dallas County. Bogue Chitto lay in the heart of Alabama's Black Belt, a major cotton-producing region of the United States. According to AMELIA BOYNTON ROBINSON, a community leader and voting rights activist who interviewed Redoshi in the 1930s, Redoshi was a twelve-year-old girl when she was sold and was married arbitrarily to Yawith, a much older man from a different ethnic group. Upon arrival at the Smith plantation, Redoshi was renamed Sally, or Sallie, Smith and Yawith became known as William, or Billy, Smith. The couple was enslaved to Washington Smith for the next five years and worked in both his household and cotton fields.

After the Civil War formally granted them their freedom, Redoshi and Yawith continued to labor as sharecroppers on the Smith plantation. The couple found that the amount of cotton that they produced was miscounted when they tried to sell it, a common practice by plantation owners and merchants in the Black Belt that was designed to keep black farmers in perpetual debt to white landlords. In response, Yawith developed a system for recording independently the amount of cotton that he produced. Together, Redoshi and Yawith had a daughter to whom they gave a West African name, which was recorded variously on census and marriage data as Leasy, Luth A., Lethe, Lethia, Letia, and Lethy. Boynton Robinson recalled that Redoshi also had many great-grandchildren, some of whom became public school teachers and ministers.

Redoshi and her fellow *Clotilda* captives were among the few African-born slaves who lived through the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow. Even more remarkably for a survivor of the transatlantic slave trade, Redoshi bore witness to the activist beginnings of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement through her associations with Amelia Boynton Robinson and Bogue Chitto, which was nicknamed "Freetown" because, unlike surrounding black communities, which were only permitted to leave their landowners' property on Saturdays, its members could travel whenever they chose, and which became an important center in the campaign for voting rights in the 1960s.

Redoshi was buried on the plantation where she had been enslaved, which had passed to Washington Smith's daughter Ida B. Quarles in the years before Redoshi's death. Records show that Redoshi held on to her West African spiritual beliefs and language throughout her life. Redoshi's effort to retain her heritage suggests that she continued to hope that she might one day return to her homeland, and she took great pleasure in meeting a fellow African, Ugandan Tuskegee graduate Danieri Kato, in the final year of her life. Also in the last year of her life, Redoshi appeared in the U.S. Department of Agriculture film *The Negro Farmer: Extension Work for Better Farming and Better Living* (1938). *The Negro Farmer's* recording of Redoshi is the only known footage of a female transatlantic slave trade survivor.

Bibliography

There is footage of Redoshi 1 minute, 55 seconds into the U.S. Department of Agriculture film *The Negro Farmer: Extension Work for Better Farming and Better Living* (1938). A copy of this film can be seen online on Youtube. This link was viable as of June 2020.

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