

Book portrays people enmeshed in slave trade

February 11, 2014 11:00 AM Elisabeth Morgan
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[Randy Sparks](#), a professor of history at Tulane University, has published [*Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade*](#) (Harvard University Press, 2014).



Historian Randy Sparks delves into the intimate underground world of Annamaboe to understand the distribution of power and the process of enslavement. William Sessarakoo, shown in this 1749 portrait by Gabriel Mathais, was deceitfully sold into slavery. (The Menil Collection, Houston)

The text chronicles the development of the African town Annamaboe, the largest slave trading port on the Gold Coast during the 18th century.

Illustrating the social, cultural and economic world that made Annamaboe such a powerful town, Sparks examines the personal and professional lives of a few powerful individuals.

“It makes for a much more interesting narrative when you put real people into the story,” says Sparks, who turned to the British National Archives to study the original correspondence letters of the Royal African Company with the elite Africans and Europeans involved in the trade.

Jonathan Yardley of the [*Washington Post*](#) calls Sparks' book a “pathfinding work.”

The project began with Sparks' interest in William Sessarakoo, the son of the African ruler of Annamaboe, John Corantee. Sessarakoo was deceitfully sold into slavery by an English merchant, and upon his return, his story was heavily publicized.

It was this case that led Sparks to his research of Sessarakoo's lesser-documented but more powerful father, Corraantee.

“The thing that was amazing about Corraantee,” says Sparks, “was the degree to which he understood the larger geo-politics of the Atlantic world. He knew how to play the English against the French. He's not ignorant of the Atlantic world; he's very much able to exploit it.”

Surrounding Corraantee, another historical figure comes to light: Richard Brew, an Irishman who traveled to Africa to work for the Royal African Company and eventually became chief of the company's fort there. Brew married Corraantee's daughter, forming a union between the British and African families that highlights the complex social world involved in the Atlantic trading world.

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