

Rede von Tamara Lanier (Norwich, CT, USA) an der Vernissage der Agassiz-Ausstellung am Freitag, 29. Juni 2012 im Museum Grindelwald

**Amazingly, two of these slaves are my ancestors!**

In 1850, Louis Agassiz commissioned the photographer J.T. Zealy to capture what he believed to be evidence racial superiority. The slaves depicted in these daguerreotypes have touched the hearts and conscience of people worldwide.

Approximately thirty-seven years ago, a Harvard associate unearthed an amazing discovery. Found in the attic of the Peabody Museum were these piercing and poignant images of the evils of slavery.

Amazingly, I have historical and US Census information confirming that two of these slaves are, in fact, my ancestors.

I have shared this information with historians in many parts of the world all of whom have found my story remarkable.

But even more amazing was the historical significance of these photos and how these painful images of slavery captured the hearts and the minds of people from all parts of the world.

I have been told by Yale that I have a story that needs to be told; and a Harvard historian has describe my story as "a missing link in history".

In January of 2010, I lost my mother, Mattye Thompson Lanier.

From as far back as I can remember, my Mom told the story of her ancestry. She talked of an African born slave by the name of Renty, whom she fondly referred to as Papa Renty.

I am told that the term "Papa" is an African term of endearment, signifying respect

My Mom told the story as it was told to her. Papa Renty was called the Black African, he was a small man, but to his peers, he was larger than life.

The fact that Papa was called the "Black African" by his peers solidifies that fact that he is the Renty in the photos as Agassiz research focused on African born slaves.

Papa Renty was educated and self-taught. He learned and taught others to read using a book called the "Blue Back Webster".

Papa Renty was a slave in South Carolina, on the Taylor Plantation and some of his children were sold south to a Thompson Plantation in Alabama.

Papa Renty had a son, Renty Taylor who took on the name Renty Thompson after being sold south.

My Mom, who was a teacher and educator, made sure that her family knew the story of Papa Renty; it is a story that has been passed down from generation to generation for the last 160 years.

In her later years, my Mother insisted that we document the story; in May of 2004, I recorded my Mom as she recalled her history. She died not knowing the significance of Papa Renty.

Approximately 15 years ago my daughter, who was 8 year old at the time, interviewed my mom and wrote a small book on Papa Renty.

After my mother's death, I set out to learn more about my ancestry. With the help of a genealogist, I learned that the Congo Renty or Renty Taylor is the Papa Renty that my mom so fondly spoke of.

The US Census shows a direct link from Renty Taylor to me. This Census information is exactly consistent with the stories my Mom told.

Even more significant is how and why these photos were taken. During the mid-1800's, southern slave owners were fighting to justify slavery and they reached out to a renowned Swiss born scientist by the name of Louis Agassiz.

Agassiz had developed the theory that blacks were a separate and lesser species than whites. Agassiz was brought to the US to promote his race based science and counter to calls for the end of slavery.

He settled in Massachusetts and protected his theory. History describes Agassiz as the "Pioneer Thinker of Apartheid". The daguerreotypes were taken and used as propaganda to oppress people in many parts of the world.

Even more amazing is what is currently happening right here in Switzerland. A young woman by the name of Sasha Huber and a gentleman by the name of Hans Fässler have launched a campaign to denounce the racial science of Louis Agassiz, pointing out how his teaching has adversely affected people across the globe.

They are currently behind a worldwide petition to elevate Renty as a symbol of racial victimization, seeking to change the name of one of the tallest mountains in the world, Agassizhorn (named after Louis Agassiz) to Rentyhorn (named after Papa Renty).

How ironic is it to know that that Black African chosen by a scientist to symbolize racial inferiority, through his pride and his silence, made a mockery of that science.

That he learned to read using a book called the "Blue Back Webster" (according to history Webster also visited the Taylor Plantation) and that he made sure the people around him could read. My goal is to correct history and to share with all that Congo Renty was an educated and exceptional man.