

“I Am Omar” by Jennifer Berry Hawes and Gavin McIntyre



Omar ibn Said wrote the only known surviving autobiography written in Arabic by an enslaved person in the U.S. Randolph Linsly Simpson African-American Collection/Yale University Library



Imam Omar ben Sayed Gadio holds a painting of his father, Omar ibn Said, at his home in Gabeba, Senegal. Omar is a familiar name throughout Futa Toro, including El Hadj Omar Tall, a revered Muslim leader. Image by Gavin McIntyre.



The waters of the Cooper River ebb and flow near the Fort Sumter Visitor Education Center. Over 200 years ago, these waters carried Omar toward Gadsden's Wharf, a major port at the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By Gavin McIntyre.

The closing door



Ibrahima Diallo (left), Mousse Dia, Mamadou Sow, Mousse Ba and Oumar Ba sit around Ousmane Sow as he fans charcoal underneath a pot of mint tea. They will serve it to the imam and his guests after the Friday prayer service in Orefonde, Senegal. Image by Gavin McIntyre.

The din of Babel





The schooner Pride sails through Charleston Harbor past The Battery. The ship is a reminder of Charleston's commercial waterfront business during the 1800s, including the sale of enslaved people from Africa. In 1807, a ship carrying Omar ibn Said sailed into the harbor toward the city's many church steeples. By Gavin McIntyre.

Flight for freedom



The Cape Fear River flows through Fayetteville, N.C., and past the Milton and Owen Hill plantations farther south. Omar remained enslaved near these waters until his death in 1863. By Gavin McIntyre.

No more hiding



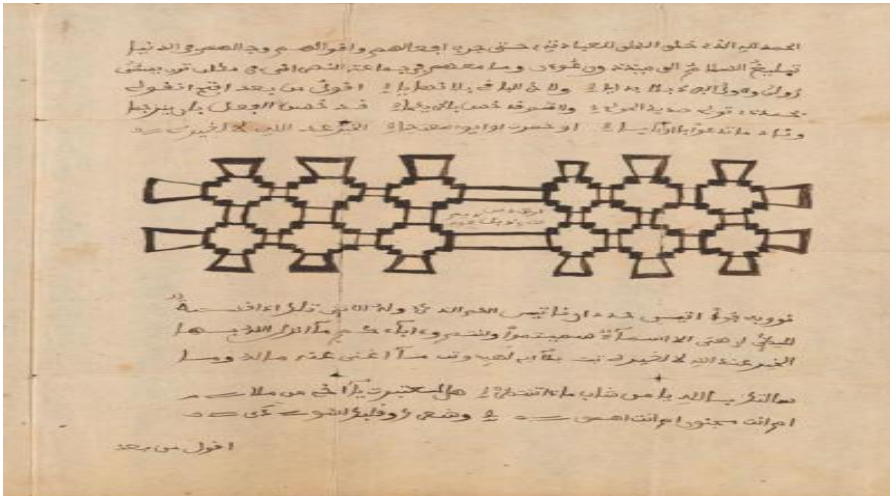
Charleston's newspapers filled with notices of enslaved Africans for sale and those who had escaped their enslavers. Omar ibn Said wrote that he escaped from an "evil" man named Johnson.

Becoming Uncle Moro



Mauritania is visible from the window of an abandoned building in Podor across the Senegal River. When Omar ibn Said was alive, Moors from Mauritania crossed the river to raid villages along the banks and capture people. By Gavin McIntyre.

The hidden plea



In 1819, Omar ibn Said wrote a letter to John Owen, the brother of his enslaver, that included a large talisman and a plea to return to Africa. Yale University Library.

Breaking the code



John Owen was James Owen's brother and a governor of North Carolina. State Archives of North Carolina

Allah in the Bible



After his 1820 baptism, Omar ibn Said was listed on First Presbyterian Church's membership rolls under People of Colour as "Moroe-Property of Geo. Owen." The story of his conversion garnered attention from around the country as clergymen hoped he would evangelize in Africa. By Gavin McIntyre.

Becoming 'Prince Moro'



Men gather inside the home of the imam of the Mausolee Seydou Nourou Tall in Dakar, Senegal. With a Friday prayer service approaching, they chant verses from the Quran. By Gavin McIntyre.

Tale of resistance



The words "Uncle Moro" were written on this photograph of Omar ibn Said. DeRosset Papers, the Southern Historical Collection/UNC at Chapel Hill.

'The leaning tree'

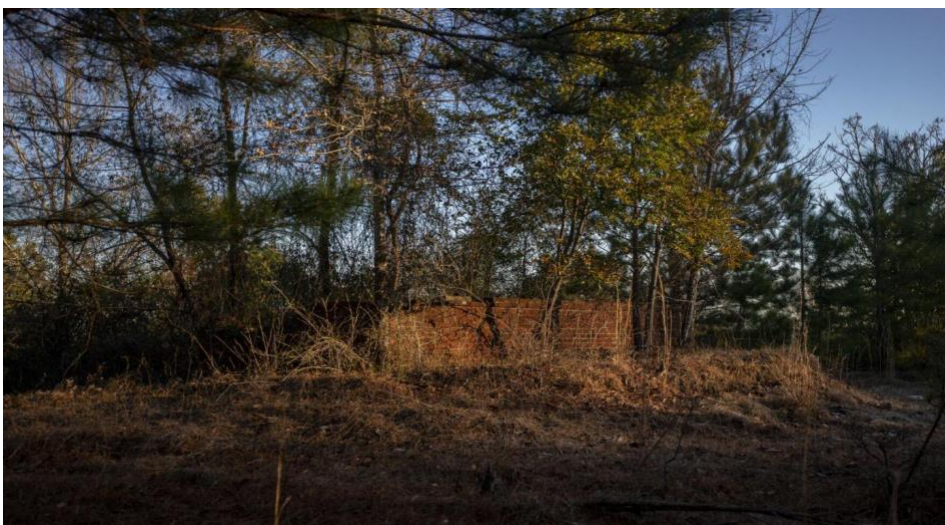


Several years after writing his autobiography in 1831, Omar ibn Said moved with James Owen and his family to Wilmington, N.C. Omar often entertained their guests as the mythology of his life and faith grew. By Gavin McIntyre.

Twilight of life



James Owen and his wife, Eliza, are buried beside their children in the Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington, N.C. James Owen died at the family's plantation Owen Hill two years after Omar ibn Said died there in 1863. By Gavin McIntyre.



Sunrise slowly turns the brick wall surrounding the Owen family graveyard golden among overgrown trees. Omar ibn Said was buried somewhere in the vicinity after he died in 1863. Although legend says Omar had a tombstone, no marker remains today. By Gavin McIntyre.



Imam Bobby Abdul Hameed Thomas leads the Friday prayer service outside the Masjid Omar Ibn Sayyid in Fayetteville, N.C. By Gavin McIntyre.

Omar as criminal



Two boys cast a fishing net on the Senegal River near the village of Coppe. By Gavin McIntyre.

The authentic story



A sword belonging to El Hadj Omar Tall is on display at the Museum of Black Civilizations in Dakar after a French museum returned it. Tall was a Muslim leader from Futa Toro who fought the French during the 1800s. By Gavin McIntyre.



Professor Boubacar Barry sits in the library of his home in Dakar, Senegal, where he's spent 40 years studying slavery in West Africa. He cannot pinpoint the number of people sold into slavery from Senegal, but to him what matters most is the impact and lost relationships. "We have been separated for so long," he said. By Gavin McIntyre.

The 'wrong' places



Amandine Situ Bocco, left, graduate student at the IFAN Cheikh Anta Diop University, and Mamaram Seck, a linguistics researcher at the university, page through books about slavery inside a museum in Saint-Louis, Senegal. By Gavin McIntyre.



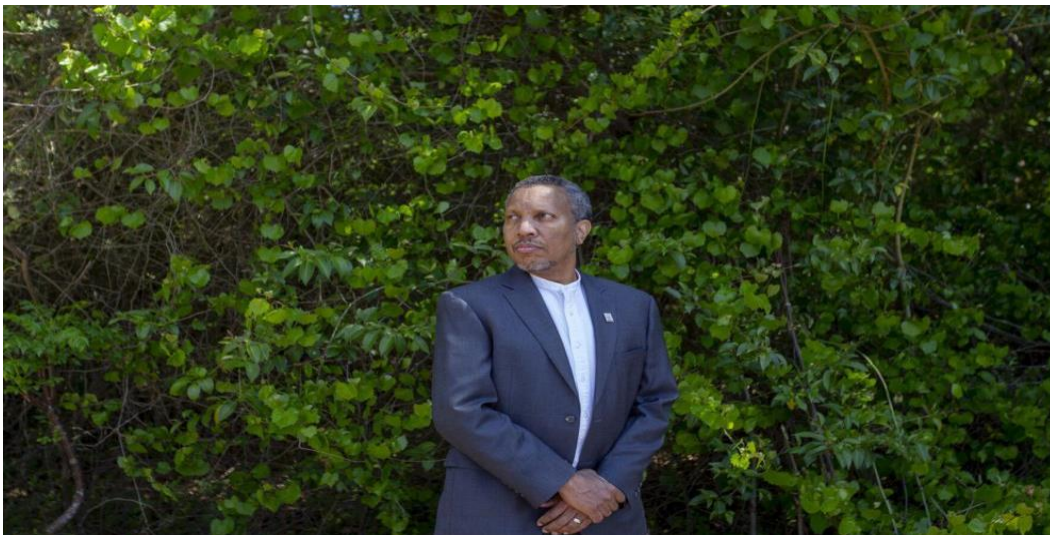
Fama Diagne, center, places rice on a plate while preparing a family meal with her mother and sister, both named Fama, in their home in Saint-Louis, Senegal. By Gavin McIntyre.



Ibrahima Diallo runs toward the home of the imam of a mosque in Orefonde, Senegal. By Gavin McIntyre



Abou Diallo takes a break from chanting and writing verses from the Quran on a wooden tablet to laugh with other students in his Quranic school in his Quranic school in the small village of Dimat Walo in Senegal. Omar ibn Said likely memorized the Quran using the same method. By Gavin McIntyre.



Adam Beyah converted to Islam in 1972, through the Nation of Islam. When he later moved to Fayetteville, N.C., he joined a mosque named for Omar ibn Said and led an effort to get a state historical marker about Omar placed in front of it. By Gavin McIntyre



Vendors selling fish, vegetables and grains line the walkway of a market in the Senegalese port city of Saint-Louis. Omar ibn Said likely was put aboard a slave ship off the city's coast before it left for Charleston. By Gavin McIntyre.

Close encounter



Shrouded in dust, the Isle of Morfil once was a more fertile landscape. By Gavin McIntyre.



Dust from the Sahara Desert fills the sky as residents of Coppe work on a boat along the banks of the Senegal River. The small village has existed for 400 years and might be the place Omar ibn Said named in his writings. /by Gavin McIntyre.