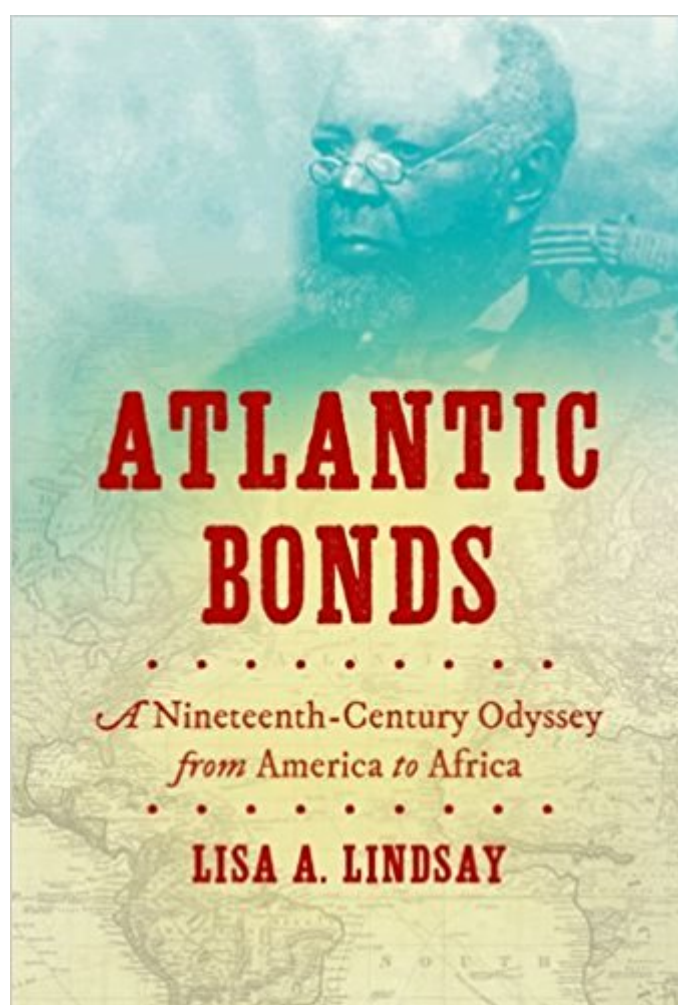


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Atlantic Bonds: A Nineteenth-Century Odyssey From America To Africa (H. Eugene And Lillian Youngs Lehman Series)



Synopsis

A decade before the American Civil War, James Churchwill Vaughan (1828–1893) set out to fulfill his formerly enslaved father's dying wish that he should leave America to start a new life in Africa. Over the next forty years, Vaughan was taken captive, fought in African wars, built and rebuilt a livelihood, and led a revolt against white racism, finally becoming a successful merchant and the founder of a wealthy, educated, and politically active family. Tracing Vaughan's journey from South Carolina to Liberia to several parts of Yorubaland (present-day southwestern Nigeria), Lisa Lindsay documents this "free" man's struggle to find economic and political autonomy in an era when freedom was not clear and unhindered anywhere for people of African descent. In a tour de force of historical investigation on two continents, Lindsay tells a story of Vaughan's survival, prosperity, and activism against a seemingly endless series of obstacles. By following Vaughan's transatlantic journeys and comparing his experiences to those of his parents, contemporaries, and descendants in Nigeria and South Carolina, Lindsay reveals the expansive reach of slavery, the ambiguities of freedom, and the surprising ways that Africa, rather than America, offered new opportunities for people of African descent.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wonderfully researched and brilliantly narrated, *Atlantic Bonds* uniquely reconstructs the incredible history of the Vaughan family, a multigenerational, slave-descended family that endured the expansion of slavery, the rise of West African colonization (by Britain as well as the United States),

the aftermath of emancipation, and the transformation of the African diaspora. By seamlessly weaving together macro- and micro-level analysis, Lindsay brings to life the story of how Church Vaughan and his descendants navigated the epic transformations of their times.--Kristin Mann, Emory University

Vaughan's life—arcing, roughly, from the United States to Africa—captures continental histories of oppression and violence, but it also reveals the capacity of a single person or family to make some small, safe space through sheer force of will. This is an astonishing history, one of the most compelling and moving books I've ever read.--Matthew Guterl, author of *Josephine Baker and the Rainbow Tribe*

Lisa A. Lindsay is a Bowman and Gordon Gray Distinguished Term associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A very dramatic and engaging unique account of an African American, James Churchwill Vaughan (1828-93), migration from America to Africa a decade before the Civil War. This was his father's dying wish. He did not have a happy start in Liberia, but after much struggle and a migration to present-day Nigeria, he found success as a merchant and set the ground work for a wealthy and politically established family that has had a great impact on the shaping of the region. The conclusion Lindsay presents is that "Africa, rather than America, offered new opportunities for people of African descent."

"Go back to Africa" is frequently used as an insult in American media and in historical accounts, but here this concept of returning to the ancestral land gains an economic and cultural strongpoint. The "Introduction" describes how the book began in 2002 during the author's trip to Africa, where Lindsay met somebody of a mixed North Carolinian and Benin princess descent and this inspired her to learn more about his family, who turned out to be outstanding members of the community. The extensive family tree of this family in Africa and America takes up three pages preceding this intro. The family was only too happy to talk about these roots with their visitor, and clearly were of great help to the research it took to gather the details about James Vaughan's life, which had previously been featured on the cover of *Ebony* in 1975, but was hardly known to scholars in the States. James actually did not move alone, but with his brother, and they were assisted by the American Colonization Society, the very one that championed a version of the "Go Back to Africa" campaign. Lindsay clarifies that Vaughan's success was unique and that he was perhaps the sole person who

“accomplished the feat of reconnecting ties to his African family (3). Curiously, on the following page, Lindsay contradicts an early assumption she wrote into the book apparently, Vaughan’s father was born in America, rather than in Africa, unlike the tale Vaughan was told or was passed down in the family. This is mentioned because if his father was born in Africa, his face would have been decorated with Yoruba facial marks that distinguished the main family trees in the region, and so Vaughan’s relatives would have been easier to find than they ended up being. A great, innovative biography, history and cultural study of an alternative migratory narrative. As a migrant myself, I think this is a respectful and engaging approach to explaining how being an insider in a culture can give the social status needed for generations-long successful saga. --Pennsylvania Literary Journal, Volume IX, Issue 1

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