

The West African Day-Names in Nova-Scotia

J. L. DILLARD

IN SPITE OF AN ARTICLE by Newbell N. Puckett,¹ excellent for its time, and the splendid onomastic materials in Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*,² there is very little known about the naming of slaves in their early days in the New World – or of their descendants at the present time, for that matter.³ The geographic bias in American linguistic studies has prevented any kind of trans-regional view; therefore, relationships which would otherwise be obvious have remained virtually unknown. Yet the sources for such studies are abundant. The archives of Nova Scotia⁴ are among the many sources from which a clear indication of the distribution and persistence of West African day-names⁵ can be obtained.

¹ "Names of American Negro Slaves," in George P. Murdoch (ed.), *Studies in the Science of Society* (New Haven, 1937). There have also been routine articles like Arthur Palmer Hudson's "Some Curious Negro Names," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* II (December, 1938), 179–193; and Howard F. Barker, "The Family Names of American Negroes," *American Speech* XIV, no. 3 (October, 1939), 163–174. Hennig Cohen, "Slave Names in Colonial South Carolina," *American Speech* 28 (1952), 102–107 treats the day-names, including their translations, and notes the African element in Negro names. It is, however, limited to the "Gullah" area, and this contributes indirectly to the fallacy that conditions in this area were different from those in other parts of the New World.

² Chicago, 1949. Turner's materials, being confined to the Sea Islands, quite accidentally leave open the possible (and erroneous) interpretation that the cultural practice itself was limited to that area. But there is abundant evidence in Puckett, *op. cit.*, that the names were in other areas (e.g., Maryland) earlier than in the Sea Islands. J. L. Dillard, *Black English in the United States* (forthcoming) contains a section in Chapter III which shows that the day-names were spread throughout the colonies, Northern as well as Southern, which had African slaves. A version of that section was read as a paper before the American Name Society in Denver, Colorado, December 30, 1969.

³ Good descriptions of the use of the day-names in Jamaica have been provided by F. G. Cassidy, *Jamaica Talk*, 1961, pp. 157–8, and David DeCamp, "African Day-Names in Jamaica," *Language* 43 (1967), 139–147.

⁴ C. B. Fergusson, *A Documentary Study of the Establishment of Negroes in Nova Scotia Between the War of 1812 and the Winning of Responsible Government*, The Archives of Nova Scotia, Publication no. 8, 1948. Hereinafter referred to as Fergusson.

⁵ The day-names are

<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
Quashee	Quasheba	Sunday
Cudjo	Juba	Monday
Cubbenah	Beneba	Tuesday
Quako	Cubba	Wednesday

Upon investigation, the language and culture of the Afro-Americans of Nova Scotia from 1750⁶ to the present day turn out to be very much like those found in the United States, and not just in the South. The day-names, well-known in Massachusetts in the eighteenth century,⁷ extended throughout the areas in which there were African slaves. Since whites, including slave owners and slave traders, had little awareness of such naming practices, frequently mistaking them for some European pattern, it follows that maintenance of the names was internal to the culture of the slaves. The extension of the names – which clearly included Nova Scotia⁸ – was as great as that of the Pidgin English which lies at the historical base of the language variety now being called Black English.⁹

Through the orthographic flaws and variants of the records which were kept of slave sales and shipments, it is possible to find a substantial number of such names even in a supposedly unlikely place such as Halifax. The two most prevalent day-names in those records are *Quaco* “male born on Wednesday” and *Quashee* “male born on Sunday.” In Fergusson’s materials from the archives, we find two occurrences of *Quack* (p. 93: Quack Mantle and Quack Cooper), four of *Quashy* (p. 97: Quashy Cooper, Sr.; Quashy Hamilton; Quashy Mantle; Quashy Cooper, Jr.). There are two occurrences of the shortened form *Quash* (p. 93: Quash Cooper; p. 102: Quash Cooper), probably referring to either Quashy Cooper, Sr., or to Quashy Cooper, Jr., the same men listed on p. 97. The final *-y* may represent a putative amalgamation to obvious English onomastic practices; *Quaco* may be found only in the shortened form because there is no widespread English practice of ending names with *-o*. (Also, the name is not such as to suggest that it is part of Romance language naming traditions

<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
Quao	Abba	Thursday
Cuffee	Phibba	Friday
Quamin	Mimba	Saturday

There are many orthographic variants in the records, as would be expected since the whites were dealing with unfamiliar linguistic and onomastic material.

⁶ Fergusson, p. 1, refers to the presence of 16 Negro slaves in Halifax in 1750.

⁷ Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, no. 494, 1942, recorded many of the day-names, although he did not call attention to them and may not have known what they were.

⁸ For folklore aspects of Afro-American culture in Nova Scotia, see Arthur Huff Fauset, *Folklore from Nova Scotia*, Memoir of the American Folklore Society, vol. XXIV, 1931. For Black English in the same area, see J. L. Dillard, “The History of Black English in Nova Scotia – A First Step” (in preparation).

⁹ For the scope of Black English, an “information explosion” concerning which has recently taken place, see *An Interim Bibliography of Black English*, University of Wisconsin, Department of English, Programs in Linguistics, Report no. 4, April, 1970.

familiar to Englishmen. It does not suggest Romeo or Antonio.) But the attempt to Anglicize is amazingly persistent: there are two *Squashes* (p. 102) which surely represent folk etymology. (The familiar Pidgin English phonological reduction of initial *sp-*, *st-*, *sk-* clusters might well cause a slave-owner or -trader to assume that a slave who identified himself as *Quash* was “trying to say” Squash.)¹⁰

Another way to handle the day-names, within a framework of limited acculturation, was to translate them. This was apparently done by the slaves themselves, since no white source reflects an understanding of the African forms. We thus find a Friday Bush, an obvious translation from *Cuffee* “male born on Friday.” (*Cuffee* was probably the most common of the day-names in the continental United States – being the source of the surname of the early Negro shipping magnate Paul Cuffee or Cuffe¹² – and it is strange that the name does not turn up in the Halifax archives.) There is also a Monday (surnamed Bold), representing *Cudjo* in translation.¹³ A rare representation of female day-names in Fergusson’s materials appears to be Phoebe Cooper – Phoebe being a European name which even in Jamaica was often mistakenly attributed to an Afro-American woman with the day name for Friday.¹⁴

Believing that some of the slave women were named for the goddess of the moon, the whites apparently proceeded to the next logical step (to them) and gave names like *Caesar* (in various spellings, the name most frequently given to blacks in the materials gathered by Fergusson) and *Scipio*. (It is of course commonplace that Scipio in the master’s house was “Zip” in the slave quarters.) The latter goes through the usual variations in spelling, which only go to prove that the owners and traders were no such classicists as to be likely to conceive of such naming practices without some impetus from a (misunderstood) West African tradition. The most frequent spelling in Fergusson is *Sippio*. Use of the name in the black community has apparently persisted to the present day: William A. Stewart has told me of a boy named Scipio whom he met in South Carolina, and there is a Scipio Santz who pitches for the Houston Astros

¹⁰ It is this phonological process which produces forms, very familiar in American literature by the end of the eighteenth century, like *'tone* “stone” and *'peech* “speech.” (See, for example, Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, 1792, p. 115.)

¹¹ Fergusson, p. 78.

¹² Henry Noble Sherwood, “Paul Cuffee,” *Journal of Negro History* 8 (1923), 153–232. Paul Cuffe himself took his father’s day-name as a surname, apparently as a reaction against being called Slocum, for the former slave owner. His sisters were Freelove Cuffe and Fear Phelpess.

¹³ Fergusson, p. 81.

¹⁴ DeCamp, op. cit., p. 139, points out that “the names Phibba and Quasheba [Sunday] were sometimes confused in written records with Phoebe and Sheba.”

of baseball's National League. It is one of the many ironies of the situation that *Sambo*, which Turner and many other sources show to be a genuine West African name, would not be tolerated by the black community while *Scipio*, which was imposed by the slave owners, is accepted.

As a negative factor in the records of those survivals, the influence of the whites can probably not be measured. Their influence must have meant that there were many more West African names which went unrecorded than were ever put on paper. But there is evidence of the way in which white influence reshaped the surface of black onomastics without affecting the underlying structure in the translations of the day-names. There are also records of such slave names as Solomon Gunday.¹⁵ In the rhyme, of course, he was "born on Monday"; and that seems an almost perfect name for a white master to give a black named Cudjo. Strictly speaking, we cannot know how many of his fellow blacks called him "Solomon" or "Sol"; but the conjecture that they were few is a fairly safe one. There was also a Juba Wallace¹⁶ whose first name obviously resisted Anglicizing processes which were current in the whites' recording practices in early nineteenth century Nova Scotia as they were everywhere where blacks were brought to the Americas. But the white who recorded Miss Wallace's name could hardly have known that her first name meant "born on Monday."

Neither is it accurate to conclude, as has often been done with reference to Gullah and other black groups in the United States, that the African forms were basically located in one geographic area and radiated out to surrounding places. The day-names were everywhere.¹⁷ Surinam seems a kind of center of African retentions today, but Smith records the shipment of a slave named Quako *from Nova Scotia to Surinam*.¹⁸

Patient analysis, especially in the days since Herskovits made the search for survivals anthropologically respectable, has begun to reveal part of the great amount of African culture which remains, iceberg-like, below the surface of the Europeanized Americas. Most work has been done on the superficialities, as in Mencken's recording Positive Wasserman Johnson¹⁹ and other "comic" names. Many more patterns, such as the African use of reduplicated names, remain to be investigated. But we at least know that they have been present in the Americas. Greene recorded a Boston Ken who was called "Bus Bus,"²⁰ and those who are

¹⁵ Fergusson, p. 93.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁷ See Puckett, *op cit.*, and Dillard, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ T. Watson Smith, *The Slave in Canada*, Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections, vol. X, 52.

¹⁹ *The American Language*, 1963 Abridgment, p. 630.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 316.

familiar with Nigerian radio may wish to compare that character on the program *Save Journey* whose official name is Shakespeare but whose nickname is "Shaky Shaky." Judith Farmer recorded such practices as "Momo" for Mona Lisa, "She She" for Sheila, and "Leelee" for Lisa in Bedford, Virginia, in 1967.²¹ It is a fairly safe prediction that such names will be found for Nova Scotia, once the detective work of seeing behind the practices of the whites who kept the records is done.

Yeshiva University

²¹ Judith R. Farmer, "Report on Negro Naming Practices," unpublished paper, Georgetown University, 1967. Mrs. Farmer also found such naming practices as *E Pluribus Unum*, nicknamed "Penny."

A NOTE ON MACARONI, CORNARONI, OR SOMETHING-ELSE-ARONI

The *Wall Street Journal* is eager and able to describe sympathetically – and sometimes humorously too – the problems of people in business.

When the General Foods Corporation decided to put out a product like macaroni but "enriched with improved protein quality," that is, enriched with corn and soybeans; and to give it the name Golden Elbow Macaroni, a quarrel over names erupted.

The pasta people shouted that unless wheat is the base, it cannot be called macaroni. Cornmeal, they said, is food for chickens only.

The *Journal*, in its August 13, 1971 issue, on p. 1, col. 4 and p. 25, col. 5, described the problems and the quarrel, at length and with tactful gaiety, including puns ("Corn in macaroni . . . goes against the grain").

Someone proposed "cornaroni." Mr. Ronald G. Shafer, the news-writer, added his or somebody else's "phonironi."

Acheson L. Hench

University of Virginia