

Who Do You Think You Are:

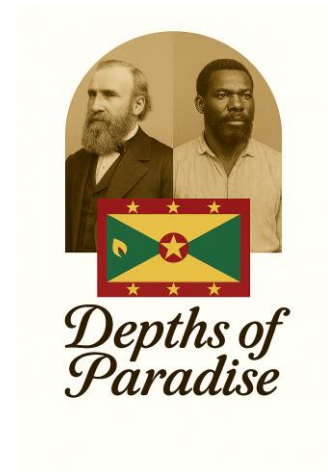
Tracing Roots: Naomie Harris, Noel Clarke, and Grenada's Hidden Histories

By Stephen Lewis - a Depths of Paradise blog

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The BBC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* has long been celebrated for uncovering the intimate and often surprising stories of celebrity ancestry.

For actors Naomie Harris and Noel Clarke, their journeys revealed a personal connection to Grenada, shedding light on the island's complex legacy of slavery and post-abolition life.



Naomie Harris

Naomie's paternal roots led her directly to Grenada. Her great-great-grandfather, **Charles William Wallace Clarke**, was born on the island and married a black Grenadian woman, Anne-Sophia. By the late 19th century, he served as an overseer on the 360 acre Mount Horne estate, supervising cocoa production some 60 years after abolition. This was an important crop in its day as it replaced sugar after the industry's decline post-abolition and Grenada became one of the world's largest cocoa producers.

He was also the Secretary, Town Warden and Collector of Jetty Duties in the parish of St. Andrew in 1921. As town warden, Charles would have been the highest ranking official in the town.

But the deeper story lies in the generations before him.

Charles was the son of Sergeant William Clarke and Agnes Emily Langdon. Agnes's parents were **James Langdon** (1802-1870) born in Somerset and his wife Elizabeth. James was an overseer on the Requin estate in 1829 and would have been responsible for the management and punishment of the enslaved workers.



While slavery had been abolished decades earlier, the social and economic structures of the plantations continued to shape life on Grenada, influencing the communities and families who lived there. Naomie's exploration highlighted how her ancestors navigated these transitions, rising to positions of responsibility within a society still marked by the legacies of slavery.

By 1849, some years after emancipation, James was the manager of the La Sagesse plantation. Although slavery had been abolished, the trade continued to thrive for other European countries. Africans were still captured and transported for sale illegally.

The Royal Navy was tasked with intercepting these voyages and freeing the Africans that had been captured. However, they were not returned to their homes, they were brought to the Caribbean and forced to work on plantations such as La Sagesse as paid indentured labourers under the management of people like James Langdon and referred to as "liberated Africans". They were paid workers but didn't receive much in the way of pay or conditions. Their experience was a lot like slavery by another name.

2,709 of these liberated Africans ended up in Grenada between 1836 and 1863 transported on the ships: Atlantic, Brandon, Ceres and Clarendon.

James Langdon employed a number of these liberated Africans as indentured workers. Many of his workers on the plantation were given or assumed the Langdon name.

One such worker was Jupiter Langdon. Historian **Terance Vaughn Wilson** found that he was kidnapped from the southern part of Nigeria. He had a daughter, **Edith**, with his wife Mary Jane. Edith Langon was raped at the age of 11 and had a daughter **Louise**. As Edith was too young to look after her, Louise was raised by her grandparents Jupiter and Mary in La Digue, St Andrew and, says Wilson, gave her a strong sense of cultural identity.

This was a pivotal moment in our history as Louise was the mother of Malcom X.

Noel Clarke

When actor and filmmaker **Noel Clarke** travelled to Carriacou he expected to uncover stories of migration as he found his paternal grandmother emigrated to Trinidad from Carriacou to find work in the oil industry.

However, nothing could have prepared him for the name that would forever change how he understood himself: **Glasgow Bedeau**.

With the guidance of **historian Dr. Nicole Phillip-Dowe**, Noel was able to trace his ancestry to his 4x great-grandfather, Glasgow Bedeau, and further still to Glasgow's mother, **Genevieve**, a woman born and enslaved on a plantation in Carriacou in the early 19th century.

The record that revealed them was contained in a fragile but powerful Slave Register . In it, a child named Glasgow, born into slavery in 1821, is listed as the son of “*2nd Genevieve*”, so called because another woman on the same estate bore the same name.

In the BBC show, he remarked “So they just called her Genevieve 2. Wow,” as he was struck by how even something as personal as a name could be taken away.

Carriacou, annexed to the British Empire in 1763, was a world of white-owned plantations worked by enslaved Africans and their descendants. Among those who held power was John Dallas, a Scottish agent notorious for his brutality, including the beating of pregnant women. It was likely Dallas named Glasgow after his homeland.

In 1824, when Glasgow was just two years old, his mother Genevieve died of “*inflammation of the stomach and bowels*”, aged only 31. Her death is recorded simply as a “decrease” on the estate return, the same cold term used for the death of livestock. Her child, like many others, would have been taken in by other women on the estate which was a common act of solidarity among the enslaved.

When Noel later meets researcher **Curtis Jacobs**, a new document changes the tone of the story entirely. The year is now 1844, slavery had been abolished a decade earlier, and the name *Glasgow Bedeau* reappears. But this time, it isn't on a slave register. It's on a land purchase deed.

Glasgow, alongside his in-laws, had bought land adjacent to the same Harvey Vale Estate where he had once been enslaved.

It's a moment that captures the extraordinary arc of the Bedeau story: from a man born enslaved to a man who owned his own land, on his own island, within his own lifetime.

For the descendants of Carriacou, the Bedeau name remains a powerful one, a name that survived slavery, endured freedom, and became rooted in the very soil that once bound them.

The journey ends with Noel joining the people of Carriacou in a Big Drum ceremony, a vibrant tradition of song, drumming, and dance that honours the ancestors.

This ritual is so meaningful. Dr. Phillip-Dowe explained that the rhythms and songs traced directly back to the Akan people of present-day Ghana, carried across the Atlantic by the first enslaved Africans to arrive on Carriacou.

Glasgow's life embodies one of the most remarkable stories in Grenadian and Caribbean history: the transformation from enslaved person to landowner within a generation. His grave, still standing on Carriacou, is a testament to resilience and the unbreakable thread that connects descendants to ancestors.

The Bedeau family's story reminds us of the strength and resilience through adversity of our ancestors.

Summary

Both Harris and Clarke's journeys underscore Grenada's pivotal role in the wider Caribbean story of slavery and its aftermath. Their discoveries remind us that the legacies of colonial exploitation are embedded in personal histories, yet they also reveal stories of adaptation and achievement across generations.

By tracing these roots, the show not only celebrates the celebrities' personal connections but also shines a spotlight on Grenada's often overlooked historical narratives, giving viewers a richer understanding of how the past continues to shape present identities.

By tracing these lineages, Harris and Clarke illuminate the human stories behind Grenada's plantation history. These are stories of struggle and survival, of navigating freedom in a world still marked by the shadows of slavery, and of shaping identities that persist today.

Their journeys remind us that behind every name on a register or estate ledger is a life lived with courage, creativity, and enduring strength.