

The Counterfoil: Tin Tickets and the accounting of Liberated African Disposal

Lamin Manneh

University of Cambridge

lm2186@cam.ac.uk

Abstract :

In May 1828 the Liberated African Department in the British colony of Sierra Leone, designed a new system of accounting for the disposal of Liberated Africans. British officials from the Liberated African Department began a practice of tying tin plates punched with numbers around the necks of formerly enslaved people coming off slave ships. The presence of a numbered tin plate around the neck, marked a Liberated African as not yet disposed of; and hence a person whose labor was still fully claimed by the colonial state. On disposal either through settlement in a Liberated African village, apprenticeship or recruitment into the imperial forces, the tin plate had to be returned to the Liberated African Department. As such, the tin plate was both a tool of surveillance and accounting, a counterfoil. These two qualities of the numbered tin plate were representative of the transformation of the Liberated African Department from an institution that primarily managed humanitarian aid and labor for public works, to one that focused on transforming Liberated Africans into wage laborers while cutting aid expenses. The numbered tin plate shows that the Liberated African department attempted to make wage laborers through tighter management and better data.