

## Melungeon Voices Podcast Season Three Transcript, Episode Six: Gabriel Greaves

**Lis Malone:** Welcome to the Melungeon Voices Podcast presented by the Melungeon Heritage Association. My name is Lis Malone, and I am here with Heather Andolina, the one and only the Ms. President to you. Heather is very amused at how I have to just still try to come up with something a little different. And every time I go a little off script, I could see her starting to giggle.

**Heather Andolina:** I will say Lis, the Andolina just rolled off the tongue.

**Lis:** My mother was half Italian. So, listen, Hey, guy. I got to make her proud.

**Heather:** I think she'd be very proud.

**Lis:** So enough about our personal family lineage. So, let's talk about what we got going on for this week. We have a conversation with Gabriel Greaves.

**Heather:** Yes. This week, Gabriel Greaves is our guest. He spoke at last year's Melungeon Heritage Association's online conference that we had. He gave a wonderful presentation, and I just had to ask him back to do a podcast episode.

**Lis:** We love when we have presenters turn podcaster. Yes, that's what it would be. Well, let's, let's learn more about Gabriel.

**Heather:** All right. Thank you, Lis. Gabriel Greaves, who earned a master's in American Studies from Kennesaw State University in Georgia, and is now a professor of African and African Diaspora Studies at Kennesaw State University. With a background in Afro Latino Studies, the civil rights era, Christianity in the Americas, and the social impact of religious worldviews. He is also a human services professional historian, educator, an interdisciplinary researcher who has worked within community and grassroots outreach for over 14 years.

And in this episode, Gabriel and I examine the possible connections of the Melungeon people to Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as discuss maroon communities in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States and their ties to the Melungeon people.

**Lis:** Well, this sounds like it'll be extremely informative and educational. So here it is.

**Heather:** Hey, Gabrielle, how are you?

**Gabriel Greaves:** I'm doing good. How are you doing today, Heather,

**Heather:** I'm doing pretty well. So, we're going to go ahead and get right into it. Let's start off by talking about you. Tell us about your personal mixed ancestry.

**Gabriel:** I wish I had charts to use, but I'll do the best I can to use words to convey a picture. My ancestry is rather intricate. I'll start with my mother's side of the family. Just to give you some detail on my mom's side of the family. Our roots are in the West Indies and in Latin America. Specifically, my mother was born and raised in Panama. She was born in I believe, Rainbow City, or Cologne. But she was born in

Panama. And her parents were also born in Panama. But for them, their parents, which would be my great grandparents, have their roots in Barbados and a couple of other spaces. Through my mother's maternal side. Her grandfather will be my great grandfather was born and raised in Barbados. He moved to the Canal Zone when he was about four or five years old with his mother and his, several of his siblings. And he ended up growing up in the Canal Zone, working the docks and leading in the development of the Panama Canal and working for the motor transportation services department and getting all the benefits of their spaces through my mother's maternal side. Her grandmother was also born in Panama but her father, as far as I know, her father was born in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica. He was a proud Bramante which is a description of multiple people from the ICANN group, the ICANN peoples in Ghana and several other spaces that were taken from the Gold Coast that were taken into enslavement.

My grandmother's grandfather was proud of his karate roots. And the end of coming to Panama we met my great grandmother's mother now I'm not sitting about her roots. What I do know is that there's most likely roots in Guyana that was also verified through DNA testing and several spaces, 23andme, and so forth. And that was just on my mother's maternal side. So, my mother's paternal. And her father, her grandparents were born or raised in Barbados, but her father was born in Panama. So, we have Bayesian and Jamaican roots, and the technical term for that is West Indian Hispanics. And again, it's to do with the intricate but those are all of our roots to my mother's side, as it concerns our maroon roots. And thank you, I just forgot to say my great grandfather, my grandmother's father, on my mother's side, though he was born in Barbados, his roots are from a group called red legs. Red legs were Scots Irish people who were forcibly deported by Oliver Cromwell in the 17th century, somewhere between 1620 and further, as far as I know, they were forced into involuntary servitude by the British Empire, and they were deported to Jamaica, and to multiple other outlets across the Caribbean. And because of them being able to escape, being unable to escape impoverishment, they were forced to be in the lower classes made up joined together, as several points with the African, Afro Caribbean when the transatlantic slave trade began.

So, in my great grandfather's history, there's a huge history of both people who were slave owners, because many Irish discuss in Barbados were able to rise up and take over. Once the African population increased, they were able to take jobs as the slavers but others join forces with them in a continual Black Irish alliance in Barbados. That's my great grandfather's history. And if I can add something quickly, I want to mention regards to my biological father's side, because the biological father's side of the family, this is where we get our Afro indigenous roots more strongly. My biological father, and his siblings were born in Missouri, in St. Louis, Missouri. As I found out over the summer through his father's side, our roots are also tied to the African Americans who fled enslavement during the War of 1812 and other historical periods, and they went up north to Canada to find freedom and many of them made it as far as Nova Scotia. They also connected several points, but the First Nations in that land and minima in my father's side of the family is deeply tied to that story. I was able to go visit the historical churches that night to historical Baptist churches that were established by African Americans, when they built communities via churches to help establish connection, and they ended up connecting with the First Nations of that land. And through my father's maternal side, my grandmother, Pauly D. Jones, our roots are connected to the black symbols of the Gullah people.

Specifically, my great grandma grandmother was born in Russell, Mississippi. And her father was mixed natives. And I grew up hearing total was one particular group, but I did more verification through DNA

testing and verify oral stories detected that our roots are all the way in South Carolina, specifically in places like Beaufort Charleston, and our roots are also all over Florida and the Bahamas. As I found out, there was a huge diaspora of African Americans, guerrillas in particular who resist it from the Stonewall Rebellion. On onward to several other great rebellions in US history. They fled the Florida and they end up joining together with the Native Americans, the Mississippi, the Seminoles and so forth to make a try racial Alliance and when, during the Seminole Wars, they fought, they end up fleeing all the way across to places as far south as Mexico. And in my family's history, they fled to Mississippi and they went up to Miss Missouri. That's part of our black Seminole, Gullah roots.

**Heather:** And that was on that's on your dad's side?

**Gabriel:** That was my dad's side, my biological father's side. My grandmother will always say, we're proudly Black, we're proud negros, but we're mixed. And when people aren't really certain about the DNA, they don't really have the specific tribal affiliation. They may say, oh, my grandma's grandmother was Cherokee or something along those lines. We were told it was again, number of tries, but verification show that it was most likely, in definitively actually, the Black Seminoles and my grandmother Funny enough, when I interviewed her, I did several interviews and recorded stuff. When I told her grandma, you were born in Russell, but our roots ancestry.com and several other spaces have us in South Carolina. At that moment, she said, well, of course we have ancestors there and she did her memory. She noted all the aunts and uncles. Our memories pretty sharp, but you have to remind her those moments where she remembers she remembers she mentioned all the aunts and uncles she had growing up on her mother's side that she knew who led us South Carolina to this day.

**Heather:** Yeah, but you know, you just mentioned Gabriel about the family saying you have Cherokee that was my family story was Cherokee? Yeah, so that's it's very, very common.

**Gabriel:** And what I found out to that point Interesting enough, the history is that for the Cherokee, there are several spaces as we know that Cherokee live in South Carolina. There are multiple south eastern tribes, of course, that resisted British imperialism and colonialism. But as it says, The Cherokees, there were a couple of different moments where diasporas happened. There are Cherokees who lived in the upper Piedmont area, if I'm not mistaken. And at one point, they ended up on the Trail of Tears. Now, some states a good number of states, but many of them were forced across on the Trail of Tears. And that's how they got all the way down the spaces in Mississippi. And further up. I say that because my grandmother said we had Cherokee, and it seemed that our roots are different. I had to remind myself my grandmother is not a liar. And many elders are not liars, they just need they don't have all the specific details of what happened. I didn't realize until I did my verification on ancestry, that there were indeed Cherokees in the upper Piedmont area. And they while they were in the trailer tears, also connected with African Americans who ended up being forced to cross and what was called the slave pillar tears in regards to the slave trade of 1808, the domestic slave trade, they were forced from slave ports from Savannah to Charleston and other spaces across on foot. And along the way, they either rant indigenous First Nations peoples, or they ran away and lived in the wilderness.

Now some Native American tribes took them in. And that's how they had that tribal history, some and there's some inter married and had children, others simply lived among those tribes, and were treated as equals, they still maintain their roots and, for me, helped me to put some stuff together with the DNA. Because I've been told by multiple Natives, DNA is only one part of the story. Culture is what matters. You have multiple African Americans and people of Afro Caribbean background that were seen

as equals, with the tribes have adopted them, though they never intermarried with those people. They just lived alongside each other and alliances, but because of DNA testing, many of us assume that they live in their DNA testing, and they don't see a high percentage of indigenous or Native American DNA that they're less native. And their truth is that it was never only about it was never about the DNA is about the culture.

**Heather:** So, based upon your extensive research Gabriel, what are the possible connections of the Melungeon people to the Caribbean and Latin America?

**Gabriel:** That's a good question. What I understand in regards to that question is that the London people have had a pretty extensive time of I will say like connect and disconnect. If you study something known as the Indian slave trade, there's a great book on that is called the Indian slave trade by Alan. I don't want to miss pronounce his last name, but I believe is by Alan Gallade. He talks about what happened in South Carolina's history for example, in North Carolina's history, when the British came through, and several tribes the Stono tribe included from what's the Stonewall Rebellion is connected as well in South Columbus history. Several centuries in tribes and the coastal native fought back against the British. And when they lost, they were deported in something known as the Indian slave trade. Now this also includes Tuscarora Native Americans as well, those who resist it. I'm really paraphrasing a lot of ways but with a Tuscarora many of them resisted the slave trade and that leads into the Tuscarora wars and many of the Tuscarora wars were deported down to the Caribbean as well against their will. And as a conservatism a London's at several points with the knots the Trail of Tears, but with the Underground Railroad. There were a Native Americans and Melungeon's who took in runaway enslaved African Americans and African Libyans.

I mentioned the Caribbean history pretty strongly because we have to remember that when people were brought into slavery in North America, they first stopped in the Caribbean. So, before you had multiple malaria communities developing in the Appalachian area and several other spaces, you also have people of Caribbean ancestors who were brought against the will to North America at the slave ports, and many of them were able to flee in to the wilderness and connect with other natives and they ended up becoming try racial peoples. As the point the PD river PD river connects to several different spaces across coastal South Carolina, where goalless were connected and many colors end up sailing up that river. I understood this more when I researched and discovered through my grandmother's ancestry that our connections were in the upper Piedmont part of South Carolina, as well as troughs.

I didn't know how to connect it until I realized that those Rivard wait those were away, one of the main ways that girls would transport goods up and down the river. And as several points along that river, the Ellis encountered Native Americans. Some were allies, some were not, has happened, unfortunately with many katanas who were hired in South Carolina to become slave catchers. And for them, we know what's not an easy history for many because they felt that they had to protect their own, do the laws that were made against them. We know that we're coastal tribes that did take in African Americans Afro Caribbeans Kilwa. As a cat as a practical example, I want to bring up the Kia tribe.

I discovered this in my research as I went more in depth to realize when the British first came here and count the Kiawah Afro Caribbeans were some of the people that were brought along to greet them. They were not equal. So, the British of course, but when South Carolina was founded in Charlestown, it was established by people from Barbados. Barbados, as we know, was the first colony established with English I believe, in 1610. And when they were brought from an afro Caribbeans, were brought from

Barbados to Charlestown. They also got involved in what we could call that triangular, India slave trade. At the same time, other natives were being deported down from South Carolina to grip to the Barbados, Afro Caribbean is being brought to Barbados, not too long afterward. You also have Kelly Navajo, who ended up helping out the local African Arabians, they join together and use canoes to do the hopping. But while that was happening, southeastern tribes are brought down to Barbados and they were either sent to Africa, Europe or sent back up to other slave ports and the whole-time people were mixing together. And that PD river when God was with the travel that PD River, that PD river, to my knowledge was also a spot, regardless of tri racial identity, use to transport their goods and create several legends, communities.

**Heather:** And Gabriel, I believe you have an article that ties into the Pee Dee River area in South Carolina that our listeners would find useful.

**Gabriel:** I do I do, I would encourage everyone to go check out this website, which deals extensively with the history of resistance, multiracial resistance in the south, there's a stereotype that people have when it comes to southern cultures in many spaces, they assume that everyone was southern was Confederate, everyone nor that there was union that's not the case. This website was called renegade South histories of unconventional Southerners. And the article itself is called new labels to determine our racial identity guest post by Chuck Schumer, he doesn't amaze job listing out what happened when people who were labeled as free peoples or free persons often had their indigenous and African ancestry minimized because that very mixture when people had terms used like lotto or musty, these terms were used to describe people of mixed white and black ancestry originally as having one white or black parent.

But these terms also included much more than that, when it came to different spaces that use these terms to cover up the tribe racial mixture there include indigenous peoples, you can see this in places like Marion County, and other spaces. And this particular article deals with different names and what those names symbolized with racial identity, and the land and the village, the history as well, when it came to people on the Pee Dee River, and how they were able to diversify. So extensively. Yeah, I would encourage everyone please, if you have a chance, check that out. I will also encourage people briefly by my say, to research something called the Pee Dee River Melungeon's from the amazing site called, Documenting them and Legends and their Kin.

**Heather:** This sounds so fascinating Gabrielle and we will include a link to this particular article in our show notes for our listeners.

**Gabriel:** I really believe it will encourage and give people a lot of different things to consider some good food for thought, very good food for thought. Also, I want to say this briefly. I did not mention it earlier. But one thing I would encourage everyone to look into as a concern is my lunch in history is history of the Underground Railroad, and Belynda communities that helped out African Americans during something known as the contraband of war experience. I shared this another venue I believe, two years ago for our Melungeon Heritage Association, international conference that we have every summer, and I spoke specifically about those recall contrabands of war at Fort Monroe. There were African Americans who fled first to that spot in Virginia, Fort Monroe. They fled looking for freedom from the Confederacy in the south. And when the union was fighting against the Confederacy, they did not treat African Americans as equal. And they did not allow for African Americans to be seen as soldiers. But all that changed at Fort Monroe at Fort Monroe with three African Americans fled up there.

General Butler, I believe, declared them to be contraband of war. And as a result, all African Americans, General Benjamin Butler opened the door for African Americans and slave African Americans to come to Fort Monroe and find freedom and flee across enemy lines, because they were not considered to be contraband. You had many African Americans and Caribbean Americans, for that matter, that and Native Americans too, who fled all across South Florida and from other parts of the South, just to get to Fort Monroe. And along that way, they encountered several millennial communities, some state because they felt that it was safer to do resistance on their own, as opposed to joining the union, where there's a lot of abuse and a lot of violations going on. Unfortunately, with mistreatment of black soldiers, some state, they live in the great dismal swamp of Virginia. Others, however, chose to continue going forward. And that's why we have the contraband experienced. And you can look up places like the Contraband Historical Society for more information on that story. But that's a huge part of why my lunches and African Americans connected in very distinct ways, because of that issue of African Americans seeking refuge and becoming contraband. delis included are in that story as well.

**Heather:** And you mentioning the Great Dismal Swamp that goes into my next question, what were maroon communities, and where did they originate?

**Gabriel:** So maroon communities operate on a spectrum, but maroon communities generally, were communities made up of those who were in formerly enslaved African Americans or people of Caribbean descent throughout Latin America, when they came to, when they were brought against their will, I should say, and they were brought into enslavement. Many of them were able to resist and fight back. And as a result, they chose to flee into the wilderness, the forest into the mountains, if there were mountains available, and they live on their own. Some were very large communities. As you'll see us bases like South Carolina, and South America, I should say the palm areas were another one the link is, I believe in Suriname, if I remember correctly, and Panama you have, of course, Jamaica with commodities. Across the Blue Mountains, you have large maroon communities that had hundreds, but you also have new urban communities that were smaller number it could be as small as maybe a community of 510 people. Some urban communities, especially in the great dismal swamp, were simply made up of African Americans who had chosen to make their own lives and ended up becoming sustainable enough in their lifestyle to trade with those who formerly enslaved them.

They were people who have traded for goods and were seldom seen because they knew how to survive in the swamps and away from the plantations that they escaped from. But again, you have communities that were in the hundreds for its Negro, also known as Prospect Bluff is One famous example of a massive maroon community it was also included. It also included people known as red stick creeks. During the Creek War, when they fought against the creeks, who started with Andrew Jackson, and his policy of enslavement. They fought against Andrew Jackson and flooded the Seminole brothers in Florida. And they fled to Fort Negro, Caribbean's fled there as well. And that became, you know, a space where hundreds of cross joins together and it was such a threat that John Quincy Adams called this a negro war. And they didn't not want people knowing the civil wars, how this massive maroon community essentially was growing. But again, you had others that were far smaller than that they weren't trying to wage war, they simply lived on their own.

**Heather:** How might these maroon communities be connected to the Hmong luncheon people?

**Gabriel:** Well, one thing I think that we should keep in mind with how they're connected is that identities are very fluid. And so, when it comes to maroon it, one thing I think we should keep in mind, is

that maroon image has often been part of the conversations we've had on indigeneity. You and I both know when it comes to Malaysian heritage, how many have tried to dismiss people, not all but many have tried to dismiss people in regards to a larger identity, because they feel that the only way you are valid and your identity is if you come from one particular native tribe, native group. But for those who are literally from several different nations all together, they're not allowed to enjoy celebrating their tribe ratio reality, they're not allowed to enjoy celebrating how they come from a confederation of people instead of one people was so maroons, if you had people that, for example, had an African American father and a Cree or Choctaw or Seminole so forth, that had, you know, a native mother, they weren't allowed to identify with both sides. And that was a tool to keep them from being seen as legit and many end up minimizing one heritage in order to get acceptance, and of course, you know, identification in the federal government, others ever fought back and said, no, we don't have to let others define our identities for us, we are able to be fully native, fully African. And of course, for those having European roots, we can be that as well.

And it goes much deeper than that, of course, the interesting thing, for example with maroons, and luncheons, and this may sound more of a trauma point. So just as a heads up, I hope that others listening understand this. Let me start by talking about something in regards to what I learned in Nova Scotia. When I went to visit my father's paternal side of the family in Nova Scotia, I was shocked to find what happened with multiple African Americans or African Nova Scotians, who connected with the First Nations there, I talked about my tribe racial identity, and they told me, you may have been told that we found freedom up here in Canada. But that is not what happened. Even when they came up here, they still have to deal with multiple forms of racism and land theft. And on top of that, the MC ma ended up being told that if they identify with anything pertaining to African roots, they will lose their status as First Nations people protected by treaty with the British.

And so, I had several people that clarify why they were not allowed to mention their mixed ancestry if they ever want to be seen as legitimate. It made me think about the conversations that you and I have had multiple times regarding the legit identity, and the need to not verify anything, if you already know your roots. And you've already known the trajectories of your story, it reminded me about what happened to multiple maroon communities in the Seminole and Mississippi experience. And several others were new tribes, that live rhythm very migratory dynamic, they didn't have limitation to one geographical area alone. With the Melungeon's, I think it's really important to remember that their identities are not only from multiple people from multiple trajectories. And in order to truly enjoy the heritage for what it is, we have to be comfortable seeing that maroons shift the way that we see that our ancestors saw themselves. They may have had roots in Appalachia, for example. But they were not tied to that one physical space by very definition of a rootage. They had to learn how to fly from place to place.

**Heather:** That's a very good point. Gabriel. Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

**Gabriel:** I think one thing that I would like to say, in regards to maroon which there are again, hundreds of well, actually more than hundreds there are, you know, at least, if I remember recall correctly, about 400 or 300 Plus maroon communities to have been identified across the Americas. And those that we have spoken about are just the ones that we know about. Many others were undocumented. And I really think it's important for people to understand how powerful the pen is, when it comes to writing

out our various identities. I think it's really important in the conversations we have, when it comes to indigeneity. To understand that, we have to be careful the terms of use for how we identify ourselves. I've seen for example, my London heritage, a beauty when celebrating with people how others were so creative in from many for many people coming from many nations because one people, I've seen a beauty in others that forced the conversation to acknowledge the rainbow, multi ethnic dynamic that comes with the very nature of Bhima, London. I think that in many ways, we have to understand that the maroon is has a similar trajectory. maroons at one point were not really considered try racial peoples not all maroons were there were many who were strictly of African descent. But for many that were tribal, racial, and had the high humidity in order to survive, I think it's important for people to understand that when they're doing their geological ancestry, and reviewing their gene diaspora ancestry, they have to understand that they may not find what they're looking for, if they don't understand how people shifted their identities from point to point. And that's not a bad thing. I know, for example, that there were others. Just and I hope this makes sense. What I'm trying to convey. Let me give you an example.

There are people that I know who historically if, if you knew that having a child There are who was white, with one white parent and had one black parent, if they knew that at that time frame to be mixed with that dynamic will lead to being seen as second class, they have to change their identity up a little bit. So, they will advocate Well, my child, um, has native ancestry. But at the same time, you also have Native Americans, as I've been told from others. You had Native Americans that did not want to identify as Native American because it was open season on names. So instead, they chose identify as African American. I had one Native American who told me talking to I believe creeks from Georgia, she said, it shook me to find out that there were critics who chose to identify as African American because at least as hellish as slavery was, they had a better shot at life, compared to be Native American, where they will be shot on site for the sake of keeping Land. This shook me to realize that there are people who have been looking for it I missed, because I was looking for only one particular identification and not following the story where it took me.

**Heather:** Gabriel, thank you so much for sharing your extensive knowledge with us on our podcast.

**Gabriel:** You're so welcome, Heather, and thank you for having me.

**Lis Malone:** You've been listening to the Melungeon Voices Podcast. On behalf of myself, Heather Andolina, and the entire MHA executive committee. We'd like to thank all of those who participated in making this episode possible. For more information, you can visit them on the web at [www.melungeon.org](http://www.melungeon.org). The information views and opinions expressed in this podcast episode do not necessarily represent those of the MHA.

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