

### **[3] Asian Rice in the Atlantic World: Using Plant Genetics to Address Historical Problems**

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Since the publication of Judith Carney's *Black Rice* in 2001 there has been a contentious historical debate about the extent and nature of the contributions of enslaved Africans to the development of rice farming in the Americas. Carney and others have argued that rice seed came to the Americas as a result of the use of rice purchased in West Africa as food on board slave ships. This research, which I am conducting in collaboration with Anna McClung and others at the Dale Bumpers Rice Research Center, uses genetic data to compare *O. Sativa* populations in West and West Central Africa, the Neotropics, North America, East Africa, South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia, in effort to determine whether rice cultivated in the Americas is related to the rice grown in West Africa. We have analyzed 167 varieties of rice obtained for the USDA Small Grains Collection. Our tentative conclusion is that there is a distinctive and closely related sub-population of tropical japonicas that is found in West and West Central Africa, the Neotropics, and North America. By contrast, rice varieties from the Mediterranean, the most plausible non-African source which European planters in the Americas might have drawn upon, are temperate japonicas. This suggests that *O. Sativa* either came to the Americas from West Africa as Carney argued or that the ancestor (or ancestors) of this sub-population was introduced almost simultaneously to both sides of the Atlantic.

