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Beasts and Blood: Legacies of Slavery in Colonial Ghana

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This paper explores legal and cultural meanings of slave ancestry in colonial West Africa. Focusing on court records and newspapers from southern Gold Coast, it considers how and why slavery persisted as a powerful social and legal category long after “legal status abolition”; and tries to relate this persistent legacy of slavery to important developments in early-20th-century Gold Coast, including colonial rule, the stunning rise of cocoa and its accompanying migrations, and the rise of Christianity. This paper is part of a larger project that explores how debates about slave origins in Ghana—with their emphasis on lineage and kinship—may have helped nurture ideologies that might usefully be examined using some of the insights developed by American historians about race.