

## *Reviews of Books*

### Global Warfare, Conspiracy Scares, and Slave Revolts in a World of Fear

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*Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War.* By VINCENT BROWN. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020. 330 pages. Cloth, ebook.

*Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast.* By MARJOLEINE KARS. Early American Studies. New York: The New Press, 2020. 384 pages. Cloth, ebook.

*The World That Fear Made: Slave Revolts and Conspiracy Scares in Early America.* By JASON T. SHARPLES. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. 336 pages. Cloth, ebook.

Scholars of slave resistance in the Atlantic world have frequently focused on enslaved people's agency, charting the actions of their subjects on a continuum extending from individual exertions on one end to collective action on the other. While individuals' acts included the forms of passive resistance and daily defiance—such as slowed pace of labor in the field, sabotaged tools, stolen provisions from masters, and flight by an individual or group—with which innumerable enslaved men and women tried to assert some control in terminally oppressive conditions, historians have typically cast the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) as the prime example of collective action. Despite postwar French imperial sanctions and internal conflicts between the polities of the postwar Haitian “maroon nation,” this revolution stands as historians' consensus high point of collective resistance and as the standard-bearing triumph of Black self-determination.<sup>1</sup>

The Haitian Revolution has also received exceptional treatment among slave uprisings because scholars have situated it within a broader global context. This has taken several forms; most prominently, scholars have tied it to the French Revolution that started before and took shape concurrently with

<sup>1</sup> Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven, Conn., 2019).

it. Additionally, as a war for Black autonomy that amplified the calls for liberté, égalité, and fraternité that emanated from the metropole, the Haitian Revolution has been examined as a mirror reflecting other nascent movements for liberty in colonial Cuba and beyond.<sup>2</sup> And as Leslie M. Alexander has recently argued, because the Haitian Revolution was poised at the center of a revolutionary global narrative and experience, it was fundamental to the creation of a diasporic community that shared visions of freedom and equality for Black people.<sup>3</sup>

By directing the perspectives and tools previously reserved for the Haitian Revolution to other episodes of slave rebellion, recent scholarship has moved beyond the traditional slave resistance paradigm and exposed the limitations of analyses focused on the local agency (or passivity) of resistance or on the rebels' degree of success. New books by historians Vincent Brown, Marjoleine Kars, and Jason T. Sharples advance this movement by developing new and deep contexts for both episodes of slave rebellion and conspiracy scares. Brown, Kars, and Sharples agree that studies that have focused narrowly on specific events or on individuals who are seen to have led rebellions have both exaggerated and obfuscated aspects of the broader history of slave resistance and revolt. The slave resistance paradigm of old, they each explain in new and generative ways, reduces the rich and complex histories of enslaved people and enslavers to a singular narrative of a slave-driven struggle for freedom. Their new studies, by contrast, not only globalize slave revolts but also demonstrate that frameworks of global warfare and fear were important contexts for slave resistance and revolt.

Brown's study of the 1760–61 Jamaican slave rebellion, *Tacky's Revolt*, brings the historiography of the Black radical tradition into dialogue with histories of the global Seven Years' War to study the "martial geography of Atlantic slavery" (2). In addition to reading sources penned by colonial enslavers against the grain, he relies on an archive of geographic place-names to reveal insights into the rebels' wartime strategies. Brown's study reveals the rebels' ambitions and failures as a record of deeply entangled African and European imperial influences in eighteenth-century Jamaica.

Similarly, in *Blood on the River*, Kars examines the archives of the political and military conflicts that comprised the eleven-month Wild Coast slave rebellion (1763–64) in Dutch Berbice. Like Brown, Kars ties the local dynamics and politics that defined enslaved people's communities in Dutch

<sup>2</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Williamsburg, Va., and Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004). For the Haitian Revolution as a mirror, see Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Leslie M. Alexander, "Black Utopia: Haiti and Black Transnational Consciousness in the Early Nineteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 78, no. 2 (April 2021): 215–22; Alexander, *Fear of a Black Republic: African Americans, Haiti, and the Birth of Black Internationalism* (Urbana, Ill., forthcoming).

Berbice to a broader Atlantic context—in this case, a colony characterized more by distance from the imperial center and proximity to Indigenous societies than by the presence of colonial administrators and planter-settlers. Driven by an imperative to center the voices of reenslaved rebels, Kars joins scholars such as Stephanie E. Smallwood, Sowande' M. Mustakeem, Aisha K. Finch, and Marisa J. Fuentes who have aimed to recover the histories of enslaved people in the African diaspora.<sup>4</sup> As in Jamaica, the Wild Coast rebellion failed, but enslaved people's struggle left in its wake an archive of place-names and evidence compiled by enslavers that testifies "to the state-supported violence required to make colonialism, slavery, and capitalism" (9) viable.

Kars's story of the Wild Coast rebellion emerges from a trove of nine hundred Dutch interrogation transcripts containing information extracted under duress from reenslaved rebels accused of myriad crimes, compelled by ad hoc slave tribunals and mediated by the court's clerks. Mediated archives also undergird Sharples's *The World That Fear Made*, a study that aims to resolve a historiographical puzzle. The archives of rebellions, and particularly of slave conspiracy scares, came into being across expansive geographies and at differing times, and they were shaped by different practices. In some cases, investigators collected reams of enslaved people's testimonies; in others, investigators only summarized the collected evidence to synthesize the truth an investigation sought to project. But across these archives, "the most powerful" of enslaved rebels who informed on forestalled slave rebellions evoked "torturers' assumptions" (19) about the nature of rebellion, negatively characterizing other suspects and using stereotypical expressions to generate fears among enslavers in the hope that colonial officials would spare their lives. Historians have long been puzzled about why this formula seems so consistent among otherwise distinct archives. But Sharples decodes the puzzle by arguing that these scripts of revolt reflect not slave uprising but the fears at the center of eighteenth-century imperialism, fears that shaped and were shaped by enslaved people's coerced and concerted actions or inactions.

HISTORIES OF ENSLAVED REVOLT AND CONSPIRACY BEGAN, in part, with the Black radical tradition that emerged in a context of twentieth-century scholarship that countered apologist slavery studies in the United States

<sup>4</sup> See Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007); Aisha K. Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841–1844* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2015); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, 2016); Sowande' M. Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage* (Urbana, Ill., 2016); Smallwood, "The Politics of the Archive and History's Accountability to the Enslaved," *History of the Present* 6, no. 2 (October 2016): 117–32.

and that was linked to surging anticolonial independence movements in the Caribbean and Africa. W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, Eric Williams, Walter Rodney, and others who today are viewed as key figures in the Black radical tradition headlined the long Black freedom struggle that began in the first half of the twentieth century. These scholars argued that the transatlantic slave trade was central both to the history of European commerce and colonial development and to the political history of wars in Africa that facilitated the creation of new markets and coerced labor forces.<sup>5</sup>

During the mid-twentieth-century Black freedom struggle, other scholars turned to quantitative data in efforts to reveal histories of enslaved people they argued otherwise remained obscured by a dearth of primary sources. Many of these efforts responded to the errors of cliometricians—most prominently Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman—who concluded that Black people's material lives under slavery were better, on average, than Black people's material circumstances in the twentieth century. Fogel and Engerman also argued that historically slavery was an efficient, modern economic institution that reflected the shifts inherent to capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Historians vehemently debated and rebutted these claims, often emphasizing the ways in which the enslaved carved out possibilities for agency within their oppressive circumstances. Among others, John W. Blassingame, Eugene D. Genovese, and Herbert G. Gutman wrote histories that detailed the contours of slavery and freedom and that validated Black people's efforts to sustain meaningful lives.<sup>7</sup> Sterling Stuckey, Vincent Harding, and Cedric J. Robinson, moreover, proposed that scholars generate new research paradigms that center Africans' cultural and religious identities in conspiracies and rebellions.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870*, vol. 1 (New York, 1896); Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (New York, 1970); Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, 1972); C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2d rev. ed. (New York, 1989); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; repr., Chapel Hill, N.C., 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1976); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976); Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New World* (New York, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> Sterling Stuckey, "Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery," *Massachusetts Review* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1968): 417–37; Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (San Diego, 1981); Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; repr., Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000); Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York, 1987).

Such studies of the agency of the enslaved were accompanied by powerful examinations of the brutalizing structures in which such agency was pursued. From the mid-1960s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, historians such as Ira Berlin, David Brion Davis, Edmund S. Morgan, and Philip D. Morgan produced voluminous bodies of work that contextualized changes over time in the legal, economic, and societal institutions that defined slave societies regionally and locally.<sup>9</sup> A related stream of historical knowledge examined the extant records of Atlantic slave-trading voyages to reveal the impact of human trafficking both on its victims and on Atlantic societies and economies. In the late 1960s, Philip D. Curtin compiled the records of transatlantic slaving voyages, and in 1998, David Eltis and David Richardson launched *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM*, a trove of information from nearly thirty thousand Atlantic slave trade voyages. A decade later Eltis and Richardson published a physical volume, and in collaboration with scholars, students, and other researchers, the database moved to an online, open-access website, hosted at Emory University.<sup>10</sup> A growing cohort of scholars in the last decade—including

<sup>9</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966); Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," *Journal of American History* 59, no. 1 (June 1972): 5–29; Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974); Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975); Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (1974; repr., New York, 1975); Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (February 1980): 44–78; Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," *WMQ* 39, no. 4 (October 1982): 563–99; Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum South," *American Historical Review* 88, no. 5 (December 1983): 1175–200; Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984); Philip D. Morgan, "Slave Life in Piedmont Virginia, 1720–1800," in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, ed. Lois Green Carr, Morgan, and Jean B. Russo (Williamsburg, Va., and Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), 433–84; Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, "Introduction: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas," in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (Charlottesville, Va., 1993), 1–45; Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *WMQ* 53, no. 2 (April 1996): 251–88; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Williamsburg, Va., and Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998); Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford, 2006); Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Wis., 1969); David Eltis et al., eds., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, 1999); Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven, Conn., 2010); The Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org>. The database has subsequently expanded to comprise thirty-six thousand slaving expeditions and is now hosted by Rice University. For an excellent contextualization of the creation of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, see Jessica Marie Johnson, "Markup Bodies: Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads," *Social Text* 36, no. 4 (137) (December 2018): 57–79, esp. 59–65.

Sean M. Kelley, Gregory E. O'Malley, and Leonardo Marques—have added to and drawn from the database to produce rich new histories of, for example, the voyage of a single slave-trading vessel in the mid-1750s, the extensive networks of transshipment of enslaved Africans from British slave traders to Spanish ports, and the role of U.S. slave traders in the transatlantic trade of the early nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

By the late twentieth century, historians were applying models for studying the temporal, geographic, political, cultural, and economic circumstances shaping the lives of the enslaved to the study of slave conspiracies. Such analyses, however, produced results that sat uneasily with previous assumptions. The *William and Mary Quarterly* Forum “The Making of a Slave Conspiracy,” published in two parts in 2001 and 2002, provides a particularly instructive example. Prompted by books published in 1999 and 2000 by Edward A. Pearson, Douglas R. Egerton, and David Robertson, the Forum centered on an essay by historian Michael P. Johnson that reassessed the primary evidence of the Denmark Vesey conspiracy, prepared in the conspiracy's wake by an ad hoc slave tribunal and titled the *Official Report*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For the voyage of a single slave-trading vessel, see Sean M. Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare: A Journey into Captivity from Sierra Leone to South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2016). For the extensive networks, see Gregory E. O'Malley, *Final Passages: The Intercolonial Slave Trade of British America, 1619–1807* (Williamsburg, Va., and Chapel Hill, N.C., 2014). For the role of U.S. slave traders, see Leonardo Marques, *The United States and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to the Americas, 1776–1867* (New Haven, Conn., 2016).

<sup>12</sup> The story of the Vesey conspiracy, as commonly told until the late twentieth century, was that Telemaque, known as Denmark Vesey, recruited coconspirators from Charleston's enslaved laboring population in a plan to attack the city's arsenals and guardhouses, seize arms, kill all white people, burn the city, and free people enslaved in the city and on local plantations. In 1822, inspired by memories of the French Revolution, the organizers targeted July 14, Bastille Day, and envisioned an escape to Haiti aboard commandeered vessels. Days before the rebellion was to begin, it was betrayed by several enslaved people. Lionel Henry Kennedy and Thomas Parker, eds., *An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes, Charged with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South Carolina: Preceded by an Introduction and Narrative; and, in an Appendix, A Report of the Trials of Four White Persons on Indictments for Attempting to Excite the Slaves to Insurrection* (Charleston, S.C., 1822). See “Forum: The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, Part 1,” *WMQ* 58, no. 4 (October 2001): 913–76, esp. Michael P. Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,” *ibid.*, 915–76; “Forum of a Slave Conspiracy, Part 2,” *WMQ* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 135–202. Also see Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Madison, Wis., 1999); Edward A. Pearson, ed., *Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999); David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey: The Buried Story of America's Largest Slave Rebellion and the Man Who Led It* (New York, 2000). For other related works, see Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993); Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy*, 2d ed. (Baton Rouge, La., 1995); Robert Paquette, “From Rebellion to Revisionism: The Continuing Debate about the Denmark Vesey Affair,” *Journal of the Historical Society* 4, no. 3 (September 2004): 291–334. See also the important later contribution of James O'Neil Spady, “Power and Confession: On the Credibility of the Earliest Reports of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy,” *WMQ* 68, no. 2 (April 2011): 287–304.



Johnson used this evidence—a transcript and narrative based upon testimonies extracted under duress from both enslaved and free conspirators—to argue that, rather than a rebellion forestalled, the Vesey conspiracy was fabricated by the tribunal's judges who were acting with political motivations. Unbalanced power relations defined the conspiracy, Johnson argued, and officials generated misinformation to exploit racially motivated fears.

This interpretation posed a significant challenge to the traditional view of the Vesey conspiracy. But it also raised the question of how to assess and contextualize evidence that scholars had previously viewed as testimony of Black resistance. How, Johnson asked, were scholars to recover the voices of the oppressed in documents compiled by their oppressors? How were scholars to contextualize and examine the trial records of conspiracy plots framed by colonial officials who wielded the power of the state against enslaved would-be rebels?<sup>13</sup> In the Forum's most instructive response to Johnson's essay, Thomas J. Davis pointed out that dubious evidence of the plot, gathered quickly from enslaved people under duress, provided prosecutors with an opportunity to exhibit the power of the state to put down rebellious slaves by force and as deterrents to future plots.<sup>14</sup> Rather than debate the veracity of the evidence at the center of the Vesey conspiracy or the agency of its participants, Davis drew attention to the widespread environment of fear the alleged conspiracy generated to explain colonial officials' hasty investigation of the plot.

In short, the Black radical tradition generated strong counters to early twentieth-century slavery apologists. Inspired by the powerful Black freedom struggle's protests for civil rights, midcentury historians of enslaved agency, communities, resistance, and revolt produced work characterized by unprecedented detail and intimacy, while others began to revise the outdated history of imperial exploration and conquest in the Atlantic world—the proverbial guns, gold, and glory narrative—by turning attention to the full scope of the transatlantic slave trade. But as this scholarship developed, it also began to raise questions concerning evidence of resistance and to expose faultlines in the pursuit of agency.

<sup>13</sup> Michael P. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," *WMQ* 58, no. 4 (October 2001): 915–76. Responding to Johnson's essay, Edward A. Pearson, Douglas R. Egerton, and David Robertson defended their assessments of the conspiracy. See Pearson, "Trials and Errors: Denmark Vesey and His Historians," *WMQ* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 137–42; Egerton, "Forgetting Denmark Vesey; Or, Oliver Stone Meets Richard Wade," *ibid.*, 143–52; Robertson, "Inconsistent Contextualism: The Hermeneutics of Michael Johnson," *ibid.*, 153–58. Johnson, granted the last word, offered a more concise summary of his findings. See Johnson, "Reading Evidence," *ibid.*, 193–202.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Davis, "Conspiracy and Credibility: Look Who's Talking, about What: Law Talk and Loose Talk," *WMQ* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 167–74; Johnson, *WMQ* 58: 920. Davis's own study of the colonial New York slave plot of 1741–42 concluded that conspiracy prosecutors, aware of the delicate context of fear in which they operated and facing "a backlash of political criticism," sought to amass indisputable proof of an imminent slave rebellion. See Davis, *WMQ* 59: 173 (quotation); Davis, *A Rumor of Revolt: The "Great Negro Plot" in Colonial New York* (Amherst, Mass., 1985).

Vincent Brown's, Marjoleine Kars's, and Jason T. Sharples's books align with recent scholarship that builds on these related but varied foundations to produce powerful new insights that challenge some basic assumptions about the worlds and actions of the enslaved. For example, in a study of eighteenth-century Martinique, Brett Rushforth has revealed how the maroons who played a key role in the *Gauolet* uprising of 1710 integrated themselves into slave society and plantation life to maintain networks that limited planter power while forming French Martinique's "alternative econom[y]" of slavery. Kathryn Benjamin Golden has carefully mined county court records to recover the history of perpetual maroon resistance in and around the Great Dismal Swamp, creating an "insurgent ecology" that generated widespread fears among whites in eastern Virginia and North Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By examining Jamaican marketplaces of the early nineteenth century, Shauna J. Sweeney has noted a marked increase in market marronage among enslaved women who sought refuge and sustenance, not in remote or inaccessible landscapes but in highly visible public marketplaces. And Randy M. Browne has shown that British Berbice's fiscal (the official charged with investigating enslaved people's complaints in the early nineteenth century) kept records prior to emancipation that reveal firsthand—but imperfect—testimony of the colony's cultural, social, and political histories of enslavement, survival, and cultural regeneration.<sup>15</sup>

Brown's, Kars's, and Sharples's monographs similarly move beyond the slave resistance continuum by revealing some surprising elements of the specific temporal, economic, and political circumstances that gave shape to enslaved people's lives and that enslaved people's daily activities helped to shape. Transcending previous studies bound by local, regional, or national frameworks and by questions of agency, Brown, Kars, and Sharples embody a richly generative scholarly trend certain to produce novel understandings of the history of the Atlantic world.

IN THE SPRING OF 1760, enslaved West Africans known as Coromantees revolted in Jamaica, initiating an episodic rebellion that extended into October 1761.<sup>16</sup> In *Tacky's Revolt*, Vincent Brown argues that, contrary to

<sup>15</sup> Brett Rushforth, "The *Gauolet* Uprising of 1710: Maroons, Rebels, and the Informal Exchange Economy of a Caribbean Sugar Island," *WMQ* 76, no. 1 (January 2019): 75–110 ("alternative," 82); Kathryn Benjamin Golden, "Armed in the Great Swamp: Fear, Maroon Insurrection, and the Insurgent Ecology of the Great Dismal Swamp," *Journal of African American History* 106, no. 1 (Winter 2021): 1–26; Shauna J. Sweeney, "Market Marronage: Fugitive Women and the Internal Marketing System in Jamaica, 1781–1834," *WMQ* 76, no. 2 (April 2019): 197–222; Randy M. Browne, *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Historians including Walter C. Rucker have recently noted that Coromantees were not a single unified African ethnic group; the term masked the political struggles among Gold Coast Africans who were pitted against each other in warfare and ignored



standard narratives, the rebellion was not a singular event but was comprised of multiple military campaigns organized by enslaved Africans of varying ethnic backgrounds, on broad swaths of the island's geography, and involved enslaved rebels seeking freedom, hastily convened colonial militias in pursuit of rebels, and regular imperial troops dispatched to reinforce the island's militias. One leader of the rebels' efforts was Apongo—also known as Wager, named for the British Royal Navy vessel captained by one of his first enslavers—who, as a military leader in West Africa, had been entertained by John Cope, a chief agent at Cape Coast Castle. In the 1740s, Apongo was enslaved and forcibly transported to Jamaica. Sometime in the 1750s, he began to plot and organize a war for freedom. His planning yielded real, if temporary, success. During the 1760–61 revolt, the rebels—comprised of scattered units with combatants who engaged in guerrilla tactics—achieved strategic objectives and limited victories against imperial soldiers and militia units. In the revolt's "eighteen months the rebels managed to kill sixty whites and destroyed tens of thousands of pounds' worth of [enslavers'] property" (2). But their forces were also eroded by crucial losses, and in the end, colonial officials' efforts to suppress the rebellion resulted in the deaths of more than five hundred Black men and women in battle, by execution, or by suicide.

As Brown explains, situating transatlantic slave trading at the center of European colonial expansion, as dictated by the Black radical tradition, is necessary to engage with the Jamaican revolt's history but does not tell its full story. Accordingly, he turns to the voluminous scholarship of the Seven Years' War (1756–63) and asserts that Tacky's Revolt was one of its major battles.<sup>17</sup> To bring the scholarship of the transatlantic slave trade and that of the Seven Years' War into dialogue with Tacky's Revolt at the center, Brown employs two methods for reading archival sources: first, *against* the archival grain to "investigate things the sources never meant to illustrate," and, second, *with* the grain, to point out how extant sources "constrain and shape our [historical] knowledge" (13). Brown finds new uses for Edward Long's history of the 1760–61 insurrections, Bryan Edwards's history of the British West Indies, Zachary Bayly's eyewitness accounts of rebel militia activity, and the now-infamous overseer Thomas Thistlewood's diary, from

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the community building during the Middle Passage by which some enslaved West Africans forged new bonds, a process that scholars have defined as *ethnogenesis*. See Rucker, *Gold Coast Diaspora: Identity, Culture, and Power* (Bloomington, Ind., 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Historians have recently globalized the Seven Years' War. See for example Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, 2000); Stephen Brumwell, *Redcoats: The British Soldier and War in the Americas, 1755–1763* (New York, 2002); John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607–1814* (New York, 2005); Daniel Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754–1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest* (Abingdon, U.K., 2011), 377–420; Wayne E. Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500–1865* (New York, 2011).

which Brown draws the bare outline of Apongo's experience as a slave in Jamaica. For Brown, Apongo's forced migrations constitute a microcosm of the entangled global African and European histories. Africans of Apongo's generation, some of whom had been administrative or military leaders, were uprooted from familiar landscapes and political worlds and transplanted by force to new territories where they were compelled to labor on plantations and struggled to build new social and political lives.

Foregrounding enslaved Africans' experiences as shaped by their pasts reveals for Brown "a new cartography of slave revolt" (7) that illuminates the entangled histories of Europe, Africa, and America. This cartography also unveils the contours of fear during the Jamaican rebellion: rebels including Apongo struck successfully at several plantations before fleeing into mountain hollows; enslavers feared that rebels might join forces with maroons already entrenched in the mountains; rebels feared reprisals should they be recaptured. Inherent to all contexts of colonial slavery in the early modern Atlantic world was fear. Enslaved rebels feared horrific punishments should a conspiracy or revolt fail; colonial officials feared restive slave populations that, in many instances, significantly outnumbered colonial settler populations. The world of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was one in which fear permeated the experience of maroons, enslaved rebels, and colonists in Martinique, Virginia, North Carolina, Jamaica, and wherever Atlantic slavery was a significant presence.

Kars also portrays her subjects as operating in this context of fear in her radical rethinking of the Berbice revolt. She finds that its description in the first histories of the Dutch Wild Coast colonies relied heavily upon the day-book of the governor, Wolfert Simon van Hoogenheim, and did not refer to the records produced by the slave tribunals.<sup>18</sup> Subsequent studies have drawn predominantly on these initial interpretations, and they have also not examined the slave tribunal records.<sup>19</sup> Foregrounding these records—supplemented by the daily journal of Berbice's colonial governor, European correspondence, and letters by ex-slaves to Dutch authorities—allows Kars to narrate a rich chronicle of the rebellion, while also permitting her to address key, heretofore underexplored questions: How did the insurgents succeed at rebellion and occupation? What might a historian ascertain about the rebels'

<sup>18</sup> Jan Jacob Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de wilde kust in Zuid-America*. . . . (Amsterdam, 1770), 371–517; P[ieter] M[arinus] Netscher, *Geschiedenis van de Koloniën Essequibo, Demerary en Berbice, van de vestiging der Nederlanders aldaar tot op onze tijd* (The Hague, 1888), 195–250.

<sup>19</sup> James Rodway, *History of British Guiana, from 1668 to the Present Time*, vol. 1, 1668–1781 (Georgetown, Guyana, 1891), 171–214; Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and the Guianas, 1680–1791*, ed. Maria J. L. van Yperen (Assen, Neth., 1985), 461–94; Alvin O. Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Guyana, 1580–1803* (Bridgetown, Barbados, 1987), 153–74. On 307 n. 7, Kars cites one exception, a master's thesis that has made use of the testimonies; see Ineke Velzing, "De Berbice Slavenopstand, 1763" (master's thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1979).

motivations and goals? What was the scope of the rebellion's constituencies and of their competing interests?

In late February 1763, thousands of enslaved Africans rose in a massive rebellion that began on several plantations centered along a one-hundred-mile stretch of the Berbice River, in a Dutch colony located along the northern coast of South America. The rebellion was led initially by Accara and Coffij of plantation Lelienburg. Coffij was identified as an *Amina* (a term the Dutch used to signify enslaved people transported from the Gold Coast of West Africa). Comprised of a significant number of African-born enslaved people, the rebel forces overthrew local planters at Dageraad and Peereboom plantations and outwitted Dutch colonial troops to win control of the colony for nearly one year. In offensive maneuvers that inspired subsequent insurrections in neighboring European colonies, the rebels engaged in guerrilla tactics to strike at key plantations, succeeding well enough to occupy some of these. At other times, the rebels retreated to the cover of the jungle and savanna near the Berbice riverine plantations. There the rebels regrouped, established communal hierarchies of their own, and organized their own unique politics of war.

Kars demonstrates how Dutch colonial officials aligned with several local Indigenous groups, coordinated with neighboring European colonies, and appealed to the metropole to mobilize the soldiers and supplies necessary to end the rebellion. Beginning in early March 1764, having put down the military uprising, self-appointed colonial councillors hastily convened slave tribunals to try the rebels in two overlapping groups: one group, comprised of captured rebels held in chains, accused of crimes including arson, murder, and armed resistance; and the other group, identified as bystanders, were accused of coerced participation in the rebellion. Rebels reenslaved and held on Dageraad plantation were tried first, followed by trials for rebels reenslaved at Fort Nassau. From March to mid-June, a council of three colonial officials, flanked by soldiers, heard the testimonies of 230 suspected rebels and 650 bystanders; 20 more captives were questioned in December 1764. A clerk recorded the councillors' "questions and the prisoners' answers, translating Creole into standard Dutch, summarizing answers, and writing in the third person" (247). As these hearings proceeded, suspected rebels and bystanders were returned to the plantations at which they were held previously, where they labored again in a context of constant fear. On the question of whether the councillors used torture to compel these testimonies, Kars finds the records inconclusive though she concedes that the use of violence to elicit confessions from "low-class suspects" (249) was routine in the Dutch republic. The question of torture set aside, the tribunals were "terrifying [and] . . . a process intended less to execute justice than to reinforce slaveholders' restored control and power" (249).

Despite the rebellion's failure, Kars concludes, the rebels came close to securing freedom and the liberty to build the colony according to their

own vision. Only in Haiti did an eighteenth-century slave rebellion secure more. But other key lessons emerge from Kars's analysis, perhaps above all one about the trial records she relies heavily on. Much like the report compiled sixty years later in response to Denmark Vesey's slave conspiracy in Charleston, the Dutch interrogation records were produced by local officials who, in hastily convened slave tribunals, sought to project to metropolitan audiences and to settler colonists in Dutch Berbice that they had wrested control of the colony from the rebels. And much like in that later instance too, Kars explains that during these tribunals, Dutch authorities' ideals of inherent superiority convinced them of their right to marshal violence, or the fear of violence, to force enslaved people to concoct stories that fit a perceived version of the rebellion's events. To understand that these stories of the rebellion were manufactured requires acknowledging the fears of both the rebels under duress and the enslavers who had lost control of the colony. Such constructed accounts of the rebellion were, in turn, used to cast Dutch colonials' actions in a favorable light for metropolitan audiences.

Sharples's *The World That Fear Made* is also highly attuned to the lessons that emerge from focusing on archival records as objects of study, rather than as transparent sources illuminating events. Rather than focusing on records produced in response to violent uprisings, he turns his attention to records produced by a distinct historical phenomenon that he terms the "slave conspiracy scare" (4). Scholars, as he notes, have tended to divide uprisings according to a binary of insurrection or conspiracy—"collective violence that actually occurred," on the one hand, and "a representation of violence" (5) purportedly planned but intercepted by a colony's surveillance institutions, on the other. But a full comprehension of the environment in which the enslaved plotted revolts and their enslavers imagined them into existence, observes Sharples, requires disentangling the two and reaching beyond questions of enslaved people's agency.

The dynamic driving this context comes into high relief, Sharples argues, once scholars recognize the extent and degree to which slavery was a "system of fear" (5). Earlier historiographical debates, seeking to determine the reality of slave conspiracy scares Sharples explains, focused on questions of intent and false accusations. As such, he sees them as "an artifact of archival power, forged in fear" (13), which prioritized the colonial enslavers' worries about the agency of the enslaved over their lived experiences. But as he argues, these interrogations constructed a particular version of that agency, and, thus, the slave conspiracy scare operated according to the same macabre logic wherever it surfaced. Across these events, colonial officials intentionally circulated misinformation about slave conspiracies that they then claimed to have prevented. Spun as a narrative of a heroic intervention in a colony's defense, these officials operated with a singular purpose: to justify swift and violent actions taken to suppress rebellion. Because of the

common logic across such scares, most produced nearly standard rumors. These cast enslaved rebels as incapable of acting in their own interest without outside agitators, such as Catholic spies, who allegedly sought to disrupt the harmony of Britain's Protestant colonies by organizing slave rebellions. According to the script, would-be rebels were depicted as preparing to spring upon an otherwise orderly colony in an imminent ambush. In these accounts, rebellions would commence when signaled by fires intentionally started to divert the attention of colonial officials. The alleged rebels always swore oaths of secrecy, often bound by traditions based in African customs, but nevertheless circulated lists of rebels among their networks. And finally, most conspiracy scares were betrayed by rebel informants who, fearing reprisals at the hands of colonial officials, alerted an enslaver within days of the planned uprising. In betraying a plot, an informant generally shared that key rebellion goals were to massacre white men and to rape white women, before overthrowing the colonial government and replacing it with a government of former slaves. Such a social inversion would be signified by rebels adopting the surnames of leading planters as they replaced them as family heads, estate owners, and governing officials. The anticipated plot of the imagined rebellion thus adhered to a nearly universal formula.

The long-standing focus on slave agency and resistance, fueled by all-too-important contemporaneous Black protest movements in the mid-twentieth century, gave rise to a scholarship of slavery that settled debates regarding the veracity of slavery's brutalities. It comes as no surprise, then, that fear was the dominant idiom of slave conspiracy scares—not just in the lives of enslaved Black actors, but for the white enslavers as well. And though this fear was universal, Brown's, Kars's, and Sharples's recent histories suggest that it was especially intense during eras of global warfare, such as the latter stages of the Seven Years' War, when imperial navies patrolled the waters of the Caribbean and rebels struck at enslavers in Jamaica and Berbice. Such fears were also particularly powerful during the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions, the critical wars of the early years of the Age of Revolutions (1775–1848). White people feared violent resistance. Colonial officials feared failing to fulfill their duty to protect white colonial populations. Enslaved people feared punishment, reprisals for actual rebellions or betrayed plans, loss, death, and religious violations. Even the mere rumor that enslaved people were conspiring to revolt—whether it reflected actual mobilization by those people or was constructed by colonial whites—generated fears strong enough to make local and state officials bring the full weight of violent punishments down upon enslaved communities.

Fear also drove the asymmetrical exchanges produced when colonial officials interrogated enslaved people under duress, and understanding its prevalence enables a more nuanced and complex reading of the sources produced by colonial officials and enslavers about the enslaved, on which

historians depend. And the recent focus on fear's centrality to Atlantic empires has had yet another benefit. Concomitant to this new scholarship is the imperative to attend to the complex history of the African diaspora by placing histories of Black people, enslaved and free, at the center of histories that have often ignored them. Historians of the long eighteenth century have tended to focus on the naval and terrestrial competitions between British, French, Spanish, and Dutch forces, attending particularly to the conflicts between these powers and the attendant cultural, economic, and political changes wrought by warfare. People of African descent have appeared in these histories only as bit players or as humans commodified as the transatlantic slave trade expanded. That enslaved and free African and African-descended peoples must be at the center of new histories of these global events are the salient lessons that position these three new books as classics that will shape studies for a generation to come.