Slave Resistance and Rebellion

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What led up to resistance?
Slave lives:

- A lot of physical violence was inherent in slavery
  - Slaves could not restrain this violence, physical well-being at the whim of his/her master
  - Sometimes in response to disobedience, other times to assert dominance
- Slaves had no control
  - Their labor was defined, social behavior was restricted and sanctioned, etc.
- Many marital unions were illegal, and thus not protected, so many spouses were separated by sale
Emotional Factors

- Brutality, degradation, and inhumanity → a sense of personal *inferiority* and fear
- Desire to be with their family / loved ones
- Hope for a much better life
- Slaves always felt a degree of dependency and loss of control → uncertainty and hostility towards the whole system → stemmed their need to leave

Why did they rebel?

- The growth of a sense of identity and community was essential for the slaves survival as a society
  - Families, education, development of beliefs, etc, gave their lives legitimacy and hope for a better future
- For those unable to accept to the lives chosen for them, resistance/rebellion/escape was the only **viable** option
- Not all revolts had complete freedom as their aim; some had relatively modest goals, such as better conditions or the time and the freedom to work part-time for themselves and their families
Harriet Jacobs wrote about her experience with sexual abuse in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, written in 1861.

"Much I suffered in the presence of these wrongs; not how I am still pained by the retrospect. My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother’s grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. The light heart which nature had given me became heavy with sad forebodings. The other slaves in my master’s house noticed the change. Many of them pitied me; but none dared to ask the cause. They had no need to inquire. They knew too well the guilty practices under that roof; and they were aware that to speak of them was an offence that never went unpunished."
Video: The Life of a Plantation Slave

Savannah
Marronage
Petit Marronage

- Petit marronage: running away briefly, usually into nearby woods, until demands are met
  - Ex. in **Cuba** a trusted 3rd party led negotiations (priest, doctor)
  - Absence was expensive → owners willing to negotiate
- Hundreds of advertisements for slaves that had run away demonstrate how common this was
- **10%** of enslaved escaped (petit marronage) for a period of time
- As Europeans spread, marronage became more difficult except in areas with dense Amerindian pop.

Olivia
A typical image that might be used in a newspaper ad for a runaway slave

Printed in an abolitionist newspaper in 1837
Grand Marronage

- Grand marronage: permanent escape from slavery, usually into a community of escaped slaves
- Establishing runaway communities required stability and supplies
  - Seeds, tools, land, balanced population (gender)
- Usually passed through a “predatory stage” before becoming self-sustaining

Brazil:

- Brazil had most numerous and widespread maroon communities (quilombos)
  - Due to size of labor force and open nature of frontier near plantations
  - Many slave communities in Brazil had thousands of people
  - Most ex-slave communities were groups of 20 to 50 people who blended in as much as possible, but some were more active

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Grand Marronage: Palmares Republic

○ Palmares Republic was a group of slave communities in Brazil which were self sustaining
  ■ Fortified villages organized into a tax-collecting centralized state, with a king
  ■ Up to 20,000 people
  ■ Finally destroyed by royal army in 1695
Grand Marronage Cont.

Spanish Colonies:

- Usually existed in isolated areas near the mountains or the coast
  - Farming, fishing, and mining industries
- Fewer communities than Brazil b/c smaller slave pop. and less open frontier

Caribbean:

- Grand marronage was rare due to geography (islands are closed off) and heavy development
- Escaped slave societies sometimes formed during times of tumult in white society
- When they couldn’t recapture them, societies often signed treaties with maroon communities
Factors that Influenced Marronage

- Geography (dense forests or inaccessible mountains, fertile climate, benign native pop.) impacted success of marronage
- Some slaves attempted to absorb into a city or free colored society
  - Worked better in places with a large free colored populations
  - Mostly only in Ibero-American (Spanish and Brazil) areas
- In West Indies, maroon communities developed during periods of tumult in white society
  - In Jamaica, slave communities developed during mid 17th century English invasions
Results/Consequences

- Punishment for running away was usually whipping, sometimes branding or being chained overnight
  - Repeat offenders might have iron collars with bells attached to their necks
- Maroon communities presented a threat to established white society
  - Often practiced “predatory” behavior, provided escape for slaves, sometimes joined in other rebellions
- All slave societies utilized militia or even mercenaries to combat escaped slave societies and recapture slaves
- Marronage was a “safety outlet” for societies where it was an option: when it was not, violence was much more common.
Individual Resistance
Factors in Individual Resistance

- More harsh treatment or less legal rights/personal control
- Viability of marronage
  - Areas where running away was easier usually experienced less resistance
  - Larger frontier, large free colored class --> less revolts
- Racial makeup
  - Areas where the majority of the population was African had more revolts than areas where the majority was mixed race/creole
- Religious beliefs
  - Occasionally, revolts were inspired by (sometimes millenarian) religious beliefs
    - Millenarian: belief in a coming fundamental transformation of society
Passive Resistance

- Slaves could steal from their masters
- Might sabotage equipment to impart economic harms and slow down profits
- Slaves often faked illness to get out of working whenever possible
- Also worked as slowly and inefficiently as they dared
- Even passive resistance would incite harsh punishment if discovered

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Violent Resistance

- Most violent resistance was individual and the result of extreme circumstances
  - Ex. slave attempting to kill master after family member is sold away, etc.
- Attempts on the lives of particularly cruel overseers or plantation owners were fairly common
- Women often had extensive knowledge of plants, and access to food: poisoning definitely occurred and was widely feared
- Violence turned inwards
  - On ships, slaves often jumped overboard and committed suicide rather than face enslavement. Suicide also occurred on plantations
  - Women sometimes terminated pregnancies or committed infanticide to avoid bringing a child into slavery
Cultural Resistance

- Religion
  - Traditional African religious beliefs were feared by plantation owners
  - Slaves often practiced their religion in secret or combined it into syncretic religion which blended in with Christianity

- Music
  - Traditional music like drum circles often banned
  - Biblical allegories and seemingly innocuous songs were used to express resistance, longing for freedom, or even secret meeting times and plans

- The continuation of cultural traditions in the face of adversity and oppression was itself a form of individual resistance against the institution of slavery
Group Rebellion
Group Rebellion

- Sometimes African slaves worked together with Native Americans to demand better treatment.
- Because slaves had so little privacy, it was very difficult to organize slave revolts.
- Slaves also didn’t have access to the same resources as whites did.
- Although few slave revolts were successful, they had a profound impact of slave laws, conditions, and attitudes throughout the Americas.
The Stono rebellion was a slave rebellion which occurred near Charleston, South Carolina.

A group of slaves stole firearms and headed South, eventually growing to about sixty slaves.
  - Their motivation is rumored to be the Spanish’s offer of freedom and land to any fugitive slaves who made it to Florida.

A group of white colonists armed themselves, perused them, and killed half the slaves by the end of the night.
  - Most of the remainders were captured and executed.

About 25 white people and 35-50 black people were reportedly killed in the rebellion.
Nat Turner’s Rebellion (1831)

- In August, 1831, Nat Turner, a slave and pastor, led America’s deadliest slave revolt.
- Turner and his group killed 55 white people on their way to Jerusalem, Virginia.
- Soon after, they were faced with opposing forces and were defeated.
  - They attempted to recover, but were ultimately defeated for good the next day.
- The white community, determined to reassert their authority, killed over 200 black people without trials.
  - Martial law was declared in the area to stop the illegal massacring of slaves.
- White authorities in Virginia tried surviving suspects, resulting in the execution of around 40 slaves (including Nat Turner) and one free colored man.
1931 Woodblock depiction of Nat Turner’s Rebellion
The Amistad Slave Revolt (1839-1842)

- In 1839 the kidnapping of Africans from Sierra Leone and transported to Cuba violated several treaties. They were sold and put on the Caribbean bound Amistad.
- The Africans took control of the ship, killing the captain, and ordering the slave owners to take them to Africa, though they were captured by an American ship.
- The case over who owned the slaves went to the Supreme Court.
  - The slave owners, Spain, and the captain of the American ship claimed ownership of the Africans.
  - President Van Buren wanted to give the Africans to Cuba, abolitionists raised money to defend them, using the case to further their political agenda.
- Former President John Quincy Adams represented the Africans in court.
- The Supreme Court ruled in the Africans favor, stating that because the Africans were kidnapped and transported illegally, they were never slaves, and had the right to resist the injustices they faced. The Africans were returned to Africa in 1842.
War
The Haitian slave revolt was the only American slave revolt successful in overthrowing the local plantation system to claim their land and freedom.

In 1791, during a period of government turmoil over whether to support the French Assembly or the King, news arose of a slave meeting led by Boukman. Authorities did not recognize the rumored revolt as a legitimate threat until it the movement had been planned thoroughly and was already in motion. As a result, the slaves were able to follow through with their plans with no organized counter attack from the master class, leading to mass destruction of plantations.

Toussaint L'Ouverture rose as a leader and secured the island under his control.

In 1802, Napoleon’s army captured Toussaint and waged war on Haiti.

In 1804, Haitian forces defeated Napoleon's forces, the Haitian Republic was established, and the plantation system was abolished permanently.
Legal Repercussions
General Ideas

- Property is a legally based institution, without state activity, slavery would not functioned in the same way.
- Slavery practice differed among nations and regions:
  - The more rural and plantation bound the slave, the less access to legal rights and protection.
  - But in many cases, the fundamental principles were sufficiently recognized → minimal rights given to many slaves.
- Many legal rights of slaves were suspended in times of crisis and rebellion:
  - Attempts to shut down a lot of the protective legislation during the reaction to the Stono Rebellion.
General responses to resistance & rebellion

➔ Crackdown on slaves and small freedoms were taken away
➔ Laws were made that dictated when and where slaves could congregate
◆ This was to prevent insurrection and quell white paranoia
➔ The masters goal was to police slavery to a degree that made rebellion a near impossibility
➔ Slave owners organized patrols, restricted travel and gatherings, controlled access to weapons and information and inspected the slaves quarters

https://ritabay.com/2012/02/25/today-federal-laws-related-to-slavery/
Continued

- Masters minimized the slaves' exposure to the world beyond their plantation, farm, or workplace
  - Eliminated any dreams and aspirations that might arise from an awareness of a larger world
- Restricted access to information about other slaves and possible/successful rebellions
- Degraded the slaves by stifling their ability to use their minds
  - Education of slaves was discouraged (sometimes prohibited) because it was feared that knowledge—particularly the ability to read and write—would cause slaves to become rebellious
  - This differed between regions
After the Stono Rebellion

- Authorities worked to reduce provocations for rebellion
  - Masters were penalized for imposing excessive work or brutal punishments
  - A school was opened to teach slaves the Christian doctrine
  - In colonies that had more blacks than whites, they prohibited the importation of new slaves
    - Enacted laws requiring a ratio of one white for every ten blacks on any plantation
  - Negro Act of 1740 prohibited enslaved people from growing their own food, assembling in groups, earning money, or learning to read English
Directive written in 1802 by James Monroe in response to a slave uprising
Kahoot

https://play.kahoot.it/#/?quizId=777a1741-25bf-4301-89dc-3d2ba1ab291d