Slave Resistance and Rebellion in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Treatment of Slaves in Latin America

- Between the 1490s and the 1850s, Latin America, including the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Brazil, imported the largest number of African slaves to the New World.
- Treatment of slaves varied region to regions:
  - Some slaves had more freedoms than others, such as marriage:
    - Brazil had the highest recorded numbers of legal marriages in the slave regions of Latin America.
  - Some slaves were even taught how to read and write.
- Slaves were entirely at the mercy of their owners:
  - There were a lot of runaways and suicides.
  - Most slaves were baptized upon their arrival to Latin America so sometimes the Catholic Church would try and defend the slaves:
    - The church owned slaves but they didn’t perform the racist practices that were common among everywhere else in Latin America.
- Slaves were sold immediately as they landed in Latin America:
  - They were placed in plantations for sugar, cotton and more.
  - Many Africans didn’t live for more than 10 years after their arrival because of the harsh working conditions.
Conditions that Provoked Rebellion

- Slave rebellion was a natural reaction to the transatlantic slave trade
  - Slave owners believed that slaves were lazy and unsympathetic to labor
    - Illustrates daily resistance from slaves
  - It was not unusual for a slave to be absent from their labor for hours to days regardless of punishment received upon return
    - Estimated about 10% of enslaved took part in this activity
- Slaves were forced to work on plantations every day from sunrise to sunset
  - Many of these slaves lived in small houses with no heat or furniture
    - 5 to 10 slaves could live in these houses
- House slaves usually lived with their owners but were more closely watched
- Owners would punish slaves to make them do work
  - These punishments included beating, withholding food, and threatening to sell or kill members of the slave’s family
- Female slaves lived in constant fear of being brutally raped by their masters
Women’s Role in Rebellion

- Many enslaved women were “mistresses” of their masters.
  - In some cases, they would end up having the children of their masters
    - Although rare, sometimes the men would free their mulatto children and the slave with whom they had a child
    - These mistresses were often forced into the relationship because they were considered property
      - Many of the slave-master “relationships” caused unrest in the masters home because their wives were aware of the situation but had almost no control over their husbands.
  - Because the women were so close in proximity to their masters, they were able to participate in small forms of defiance
    - The poisoned of burned the food, messed up the masters clothes or did a poor job on purpose while working.

- Women played an important role in cultural resistance, especially in the transmission of African culture from one generation to the next
  - They were also particularly noted for their insubordination
Women’s Role in Rebellion

- In 1823 a law was introduced in Trinidad outlawing the whipping of enslaved women. It was strongly opposed by slave owners on the grounds that, without such punishment, women would be impossible to control.

- Enslaved women were often more likely to be in a position to engage in infanticide and in acts of poisoning.

- Women sometimes developed different strategies of resistance to those of men. Female slaves, for example, seem to have been particularly adept at developing forms of economic independence by growing their own provisions and through trading. This helped the enslaved women to maintain some level of independence.

- But like the men, some ran away, and women were also leaders of several rebellions: one, known as Cubah, the 'Queen of Kingston', was prominent during Tacky's Rebellion in Jamaica in 1760, while Nanny Grigg was one of the leaders of the 1816 rebellion in Barbados.
Revolt Aboard a Slave Ship- 1883

Primary Source
Ship Revolts

❖ Africans captured by Europeans
  ➢ The Europeans would take the Africans in the middle of the night from their houses and tie them up to avoid escaping
  ➢ About 15 million were shipped between 1540–1850
    ■ Only about half survived

❖ Middle Passage
  ➢ It is estimated that, during 1 in 10 of all Atlantic crossings there was some kind of rebellion
  ➢ Africans continuing on board the resistance that had failed ashore
    ■ There are several reports not only of rebellion but of Africans taking control of ships and attempting to sail them back to Africa, with the assistance of the European crew or without
Ship Revolts

- In many of these rebellions, it appears that women played an important role, as they were sometimes permitted more freedom of movement on board ship.
- Maritime rebellion could simply consist of jumping overboard and committing suicide rather than continuing to endure slavery.
- It seems that the idea that, in death, there was also a return home to Africa was widespread among the enslaved both on the slave ships and in the Americas.
- One prominent form of resistance on slave ships was suicide.
  - The african people would rather die with honor than work their entire life as a slave.
- The ships themselves were always overstuffed with slaves to the extent that the people on them would have only enough room to lay on their back with their legs together and their hands by their sides.
  - On the ships, the men were often kept chained in the bottom of the boat for the majority of their journey while the women were used to do the domestic chores of the boat and were often raped by the sailors.

Slide by Ivy
Ship Revolts

- Famous example of African commandeering: Amistad Rebellion
  - The most famous example of such a rebellion is the Amistad: In 1839 (after the Emancipation Act to end transatlantic slavery), the 53 Africans were taken captive aboard a cargo ship. The captives freed themselves, killed the captain and the cook and forced their ostensible owners to sail the ship back to their home in Sierra Leone
    - However, the owners steered a roundabout course up the eastern coast of the United States, where the ship was captured by the US Coast Guard
    - The Africans eventually returned to Sierra Leone, but only after two years of legal battles that reached the US Supreme Court
Revolt Aboard Slave Ship, 1787
Primary Source
Newly Arrived Africans, Surinam, 1770’s
Primary Source
Different Forms of Resistance

- Rebellion was not the only nor the most common form of resistance that slaves participated in
  - Almost all slaves resisted their master and their duties in at least small ways because without some form of personal freedom (as minusculas as it may seem), they would go crazy
- Slave Rebellions can be classified as being as small as only a small group of slaves forming a revolt
- Rebellions were often spontaneous and unplanned
  - These ranged from hiding or breaking tools belonging to the owners
  - Burning crops
  - Feigning illness
  - Running away
  - Killing their domestic animals
  - Working slowly
  - Poisoning food
  - Mutilating themselves to the point that they could no longer work
Different Forms of Resistance

- Africans often were accused of conspiracy of rebellions that threatened the Europeans
  - These often did not work because someone would out their plan or they would lose their will to follow through with their plans
- Large scale violent forms of resistance were less common
  - They normally occurred when large groups of newly enslaved Africans came to Latin America in a specific area
  - They also normally took place when the master was away from the plantation
Roots: A History Revealed—Forms of Resistance

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNgpM9TVaI8
Consequences and Punishment of Slaves who Resisted

- The reason many slaves were punished for their small acts of rebellion was because another slave betrayed them
- Punishments included:
  - A mass execution of all suspected leaders of the revolt
  - The break up of families by selling them
  - Randomly killing innocent African slaves
- All of the punishments were an attempt to terrify African American slaves to not rebel against their owners by showing them the consequences of doing so:
  - Whipping was the most common form of punishment
- Religion
  - Slaves would resist by spreading their religion or continuing to practice their beliefs despite being told not to
  - Slave owners would sometimes force their slaves to come to church with them to try and convert them
- Raping African women was a common method used by slave owners to make them feel less human
  - Women lived in constant fear and were also threatened to lose their children
  - Masters had a large influence over who their slaves married
Hanging by the Ribs Punishment, Surinam, 1770’s
Primary Source
Cultural Resistance

- In the Caribbean and in many slave societies in the Americas, one of the most important aspects of resistance to slavery was the retention of African culture or melding African, American and European cultural forms to create new ones such as the Kweyol languages (Antillean Creole).
- The importance of African culture – names, craftsmanship, languages, scientific knowledge, beliefs, philosophy, music and dance, was that it provided the psychological support to help the captives resist the process of enslavement.
- The act of enslavement involved attempts to break the will and ignore the humanity of slaves.
  - Religious beliefs should perhaps be seen as also providing the enslaved Africans a way of understanding the world and giving them simultaneously a whole belief system, a coping mechanism and a means of resistance.
Attempts of Resistance in Africa

- Resistance to slavery has a long history beginning in Africa
- Protest from Kongalese to Portuguese
  - Ruler of Kongo, Nzinga Mbemba, wrote to Portuguese king João III, demanding an immediate end to the depopulation of his kingdom (1526)
  - Future successors to Kongo leadership would write to the Portuguese as well
    - These letters were unsuccessful
- Other African rulers took stands
  - Nzinga Mbandi (1583–1663)
    - Queen of Ndongo (modern day Angola), fought against Portuguese
    - Part of a century-long campaign of resistance waged by the kingdom against the slave trade
  - Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita (1684–1706)
    - Christian leader
    - Anti-slavery motives

Slide by Carter
Attempts of Resistance in Africa

- In Futa Jallon, the religious leader Abd al-Qadir wrote a letter to British slave traders threatening death to anyone who tried to procure slaves in his country.
- Several major African states took measures to limit and suppress the slave trade, including the kingdoms of Benin and Dahomey:
  - Agaja Trudo, the king of Dahomey (1708–1740), banned the slave trade and even went as far as attacking the European forts on the coast.
  - The successor to Agaja Trudo essentially destroyed any progress made by supporting, engaging, and profiting in the slave trade.
- Many ordinary Africans also took measures to protect themselves from enslavement:
  - Flight was the most obvious method, but there is also evidence that many Africans moved their villages to more inaccessible areas or took other measures to protect them.
Maroons

- The term has come to mean communities of fugitive or escaped slaves.
- The first African maroon communities were established in the early 16th century when enslaved Africans were brought to the Caribbean by the Spanish.
  - In Hispaniola, it is estimated that, by 1546, there were over 7,000 maroons among a slave population of 30,000.
- Following the division of the island into French St Domingue (later Haiti) in the west and Spanish Santo Domingo (later the Dominican Republic) in the east in 1697, maroons took advantage of the hostility between France and Spain to maintain settlements along the border throughout the period of slavery.
  - As European cultivation of the islands increased, it became more difficult to establish maroon settlements on the smaller ones except those with a strong Amerindian presence such as St Vincent and Dominica.

Slide by Carter
Maroons

- In Brazil, the most famous maroon community, or quilombo, was Palmares, which existed from 1605 to 1694
  - It resisted invasion by both the Dutch and the Portuguese, and is reported to have had a population of at least 10,000 organised and governed by a king using political traditions drawn from central Africa
- Significant maroon communities also existed in the United States, including the so-called Black Seminoles of Florida
- In many places, the maroons essentially comprised a small guerrilla band led by an elected chief
  - In Cuba, for example, there were hundreds of small maroon settlements, or palenques – stockades guarded by ditches, stakes and secret paths
  - Settlements communicated with each other, but most remained isolated, growing their own crops and hunting and fishing, as well as engaging in petty trade, sometimes even with other islands
Maroons

- Maroon communities are often considered important as custodians of African cultural traditions, including language, music and religious beliefs.
- African political institutions were also adapted to provide a means of establishing effective means of government, as seems to have been the case in Palmares.
- Jamaican Maroons
  - Settlements had been established on the island from the time of Spanish rule, and the Spanish actually released many enslaved Africans when the British invaded and occupied Jamaica in 1655.
  - The British in turn came to an agreement with one band of maroons led Juan Lubola as early as 1658, and by the 18th century, there were two main maroon groups on the island.
Maroons

➢ The British colonial forces attempted to suppress them in the 1st Maroon War of 1731–1739. It was inconclusive but led to the treaty of 1739, which gave the maroons land and some rights in return for assisting the British against foreign invasion and for helping in the hunt for and return of runaway slaves.

➢ The treaty clearly undermined maroon independence and led to the 2nd Maroon War of 1795, involving only one group of maroons.

➢ Severely outnumbered, the Trelawny Maroons were eventually forced to surrender and subsequently deported to Nova Scotia (in Canada) and then to Britain's new West African colony of Sierra Leone.
The Haitian Revolution

- The Haitian revolution - One of the largest successful slave rebellions
  - Conflicts from 1791 to 1804
  - Haiti was passed around to different colonial leaders for many years
    - Population was an estimated 556,000
      - roughly 500,000 African slaves, 32,000 European colonists, and 24,000 affranchis (free mulattoes)
    - The population was very divided by race and most mulattoes aspired to be like the Europeans but were very looked down upon by those of European descent
    - Many of the slaves in Haiti were African born
      - Malnutrition and starvation were common causes of death
      - Some slaves escaped and became maroons
  - Conflicts began in the early 1790’s
    - Vincent Ogé, a mulatto who had lobbied the Parisian assembly for colonial reforms, led an uprising in late 1790 but was captured, tortured, and executed.
    - Tensions between races grew to be very high
The Haitian Revolution

- In May of 1791, the French government freed the upper class “free” mulatto population but this law was disregarded by the islands European population.
  - Within a few months, isolated rebellions broke out
  - By August, tens of thousands of slaves were fighting for their freedom
- In 1793 a commissioner, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, was sent from France to maintain order and offered freedom to slaves who joined his army
  - He soon abolished slavery altogether which was confirmed by the French government a year later.
- Toussaint Louverture gained control of many areas of Haiti in the late 1790’s
  - In the beginning, the French government allied with him and agreed with his forces.
  - Napoleon Bonaparte, in an attempt to restore European control of the island, sent his brother-in-law to take the island
    - Toussaint struggled for several months against Leclerc’s forces before agreeing to an armistice in May 1802
    - The French broke their agreement and Toussaint was placed in jail
      - He died in jail in April of 1803
Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe led an army against the French and forced them to move back.

- The French kept a presence on the eastern part of the island until 1809.
- On January 1, 1804, the entire Island (formerly known as Saint Domingue) was named independant under the name Haiti.
  - Many european powers and their counterparts in the caribbean did not like Haiti and feared that their own colonies would revolt.
  - Dessalines was named the Emperor of Haiti but was killed in 1806 during an attempt to suppress a mulatto revolt.

After the death of Dessalines, Henry Christophe took control of the kingdom but Civil war then broke out between Christophe and Alexandre Sabès Pétion,

- Pétion was based at Port-au-Prince in the south.
- Christophe then declared himself King Henry I in 1811 improved the country’s economy but forced former slaves to return to work on the plantations.
- He built Sans Souci- A huge palace and a fortress fortress (La Citadelle Laferrière) in the city of Cap-Haitien.
  - In 1820, he Commit suicide in his fortress with many mutinous soldiers at his door.
The Haitian Revolution

- In 1825 France recognize Haitian independence
  - They demanded 110 franks in exchange for recognizing their independence.
Successful Rebellions:

- Veracruz in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (sugar plantation)
  - In 1570, Gaspar Yanga led his fellow slaves into nearby mountains. There they lived for nearly 40 years, arming and supplying themselves by raiding Spanish colonists.
  - The Spanish colonists did not really care about their existence and did not do much to stop it until 1609.
    - The Escaped slaves fought back
    - The Spanish agreed to a treaty that granted the former slaves their freedom
      - They were also granted the right to create their own settlement
Successful Rebellions:

➢ In Veracruz they established the town of San Lorenzo de Los Negros (now called Yanga), the first settlement of freed African slaves in North America.

❖ In late 1733 a massive revolt occurred St. John (now in the U.S. Virgin Islands, but at the time, controlled by the Dutch).
  ➢ Plantation slaves there fought Danish soldiers and colonists
    ■ They eventually gained control of the majority of the island.
    ■ They established their own government and rule but in May of 1734, the French troops defeated the rebels.

❖ In the 1600’s and 1700’s, British controlled Jamaica was a place that had frequent rebellions.
  ➢ Full of sugar plantations
  ➢ In 1760, there was an uprising of slaves in the hundreds, led by an enslaved man named Tacky.
Successful Rebellions:

- In 1831 Samuel Sharpe led a Christmas Day strike for wages and better working conditions. All of the participants refused to work but their demands were ignored.
  - The strike then turned into an open rebellion by tens of thousands of slaves
  - The looted and burned the sugar plantations near them
    - This lasted until January of 1932
  - They were then defeated by British troops
  - Known as the Baptist war, this was one of the largest slave rebellions in the British West Indies
  - Contributed to Britain’s abolition of slavery in 1833.

Slide by Ellie
Kahoot:

https://play.kahoot.it/#/?quizId=e2f2a0ea-6be0-4fe0-a43b-08a773e261f9