Historio week 6 sources

1

Peter Parish lays out the common ways that writers describe slavery in the American South in*Slavery: History and Historians.* Parish says recent scholarship on slavery has yielded results. New thought has stressed the human aspect of both slaves and owners. Parish mentions several factors scholars now consider, such as home life, environment, mental effects of forced labor, vestigial native culture, and the saturation of White European culture **(pp 64)**.

Parish attemps to describe the condition of slaves at the personal level. He describes various personality archetypes slave owners used to describe their slaves. Parish compares Stanley Elkins's idea of Sambo as a defensive mechanism.**". . . docile but irresponsible, loyal, but lazy, humble but deceitful - the sterotype of the American slave." (pp 67)**to Charles Joyner's ideas. Elkins believed the psychological effects of bondage were more to blame for the behavior of slaves, while Joyner looked more to the simple material deprivation. Elkins reinforces the idea that slaveholders hold sole responsiblilty for slave's pathology. Elkins compared American slavery to the "total instititions" of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany  **(pp 68).**

Parish then examines the sterotypes mentioned by Blassingame. Blassingame gives two other personality types for slaves, "Nat" and "Jack." Sambo, goofy but harmless, is thought to be most useful. "Jack" is less so. "Nat," almost certainly derived from Nat Turner, is the most dangerous. Parish reminds readers that these sterotypes are white inventions used to corral black behavior. **(pp 70).**

Parish discusses the rarity of slave revolts. He says that the lack of major revolts is more a matter of slave practicality than cowardice. Revolts, in the American South, never went very far.**(pp 71).**

Parish goes on to describe slave religions, and the adoption of Christianity. Historians are divided as to the depth of slave faith. Blassingame says "the church was the single most important institution for the Americanization of the bondsman."**(pp 84)**. Sterling Stuckey puts less importance on African belief in European Christian faith. He looks to slave Christianity as a front for African-European syncretism.**"Christianity provided a protective exterior beneath which more complex, less familiar (to outsiders) religious principles and practices were operative." (pp 85).**

Parish further describes the creation of a seperate, distinct slave culture. Parish cites Lawrence Levine in*Black Culture and Black Consciousness* as being skeptical of pure African culture surviving in America. Levine seems to think searching for African folkways glosses over the real contributions of black people to a new African-American culture. **"The question is not one of survival but of interaction and transformation." (pp 90).** Parish closes by noting the move from focusing on the wounds caused by slavery, to recognizing the creativity and resiliance of enslaved people**(pp 92.)**

Vincent Brown's*Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*goes into great detail about the Coromantee War and Tacky's Revolt in eighteenth century Jamaica. Tacky's Revolt follows Wager, a Coromantee slave, John Cope, an English functionary stationed in Africa, and Arthur Forrest, a British adventurer who owned a plantation in Westmoreland. We follow Wager (Apongo) from his arrrival to his execution by Thomas Thistlewood.**(Brown, pp 199)**

Brown takes the reader to the source of the African slave trade, and examines how it functions. The first chapter, War's Empire, looks at the Gold Coast. The map on page 24 illustrates the African kingdoms involved, and the European strongholds they serviced. Actually learning about how the Oyo, Dahomey, and Asante traded captives for guns brings some clarity to the whole issue**.(pp 25 - 26)**

Tacky's Revolt is dense. Like Berlin, Brown has a heavily sourced book with a great deal of information. Wading through the names and dates can be a slog. The cartographic timelines on page 134 - 135, 170 - 171 and again on page 202 are very helpful. I have not seen a map-timeline hybrid like this before, but it provides a great visual guide for the action.

Tacky's Revolt, compared to the first three books we have read, is much more coherent. Brown writes the story of Wager's African and Caribbean world as a narrative, and this makes the writing easier to follow. The timeline skips around, depending on the geographical focus, but this is neccessary for a book of this type. If I had a complaint, it would be the bouncing from Africa, to London, to the Caribbean. Though much more focused than the survey books by Berlin and Gomez, we still jump around quite a bit. But, this book draws a solid picture of the slave society of sugar cane cultivation on Jamaica. The readings are becoming less general, and are starting to zoom in on specific bits of the antebellum world.

I would like to ask one question. I still am fuzzy on the concept of "Coromantee." The book describes a Coromantee as being from a specific geographic area on the Gold Coast. Brown says**"Coromantees spoke more than one language and came from many different regions and kingdoms, from which they brought a variety of historical experiences." (pp 91)**I still cannot tell if "Coromantee" denotes a place, or a station. The book says Coromantees have a special military training, but come from many places. Are they a caste? Do they have a specific rank, like a Sioux war chief? I'm lost, here. If you guys know more from another class, I'd love to hear it. Maybe Dr. Rosa can fill me in.

2Vincent Brown examines Tacky’s Revolt and the Coromantee War in 1760s Jamaica as indicative of the martial nature of colonial Atlantic slavery and how this martial nature linked together the histories of Europe, the Americas, and Africa. Brown writes that “the slave trade forced all enslaved people to remake and renegotiate their sense of affiliation and belonging, while the massive dispersal of Africans across the Atlantic also scattered the seeds of military conflict throughout the Americas,” and numerous enslaved Africans, particularly enslaved Africans from the Gold Coast, acknowledged “that slavery thrived as the fruit of war” and “that slavery was itself a form of war” (14, 72, 92). Given slavery’s association with war, Vincent argues that slave rebellions such as Tacky’s Rebellion constituted “permanent wars” and “wars within wars,” as these conflicts “amounted to borderless slave war: war to enslave, war to expand slavery, and war against slaves, answered on the side of the enslaved by war against slaveholders, and also war among slaves themselves” and “connected the constituent elements of empire, diaspora, and insurrection” in upholding the patriarchal and imperial authority of European planters and bureaucrats amid a constantly shifting and contested imperial order (7). While slavery was the foundation of colonial Jamaica’s economic, social, political, and cultural order, it was an unstable institution that required near-constant displays of authority by white Jamaican planters, overseers, and politicians through brute force, violence, and physical domination. Brown notes how Jamaican slaveholders engaged in an “everyday war against the enslaved, writing that “martial masculinity valorized violent self-assertion, absolute control over black subordinates, and sexual dominance of women. These were the prerogatives of mastery, akin to rights of conquest, and were apt expressions of a man’s capacity to act forcefully upon his environment. The coercive power of slaveholders was seldom questioned, and slaves had little formal protection from punishment, rape, torture, or even murder” (59, 123). Slavery in Jamaica, then, was defined by an environment of domineering violence that asserted the authority of the Euro-Jamaicans’ social, political, and economic authority over the minds and bodies of Black enslaved Jamaicans, many of whom perceived of their explicit and implicit resistance to this domineering authority as acts of war against “the master class” (127, 238).

Brown’s monograph effectively reveals how Tacky’s Revolt and the Coromantee Wars can be best understood as a reflection of social, political, economic imperial conditions as, according to Brown, “the Coromantee War was at once an extension of the African conflicts that fed the slave trade, a race war among black slaves and white slaveholders, an imperial conquest, and an internal struggle between black people for control of territory and the establishment of a political legacy. The economic, political, and cultural consequences of this war within wars reverberated out from Jamaica to other colonies, across the ocean to Great Britain, and back again to the island, where the revolt reshaped public life and lodged deeply in collective memory” and was shaped by the memories many enslaved Africans retained from wars waged in Africa (73, 209). When paired with Gomez and Berlin’s texts that reveal the centrality and the agency of Africans in the transatlantic world, Brown’s *Tacky’s Revolt* demonstrates the individual and collective agency enslaved men and women in Jamaica asserted in resisting and combatting a violent and dehumanizing social and economic system, testifying to the incomplete conquest inherent within chattel slavery in the Americas and the highly contested imperial American world.

3

 Brown sets the stage for the Jamaican slave conflict, known as *Tacky's Revolt*, into a much wider socio-political context than simply a local insurrection of slaves seeking freedom from the oppression of a Jamaican slaveocracy.  He extends and elaborates his analysis on the courageous, almost in a Spartacus-esque drama, of slaves who fought the imperial might of a far superior British military force, with the inhumane Jamaican slaveholders' aid--the passages that Brown describes on captured rebels is very sombering.  He brings to light human savagery of the slaveholders in its most disgusting form: the burning alive of caught rebels, the placing of executed rebels' heads upon pikes, and the left hanging bodies of the executed rebels to rot.  Broadening his framework from simply being set in Jamaica for this "revolution", Brown informs that this "rebellion" was actually the product of a much later development, as it had its existential roots tied to a much earlier time, and a much distant land. Conflicts of an intra-African nature, which continued amongst Africans themselves, since these conflicts "did not end when they crossed the Atlantic Ocean." (84)

     The rebels had honed their impactful guerrilla-style assaults, replete with even additional psychological weaponry of their constant beating of drums, from the internecine wars waged an ocean away, back on the topography of the African continent. They had benefited from their previous experiences of combat, of skillfully staging war strategies, and of continuing an overlapping scenario of battling more "wars within wars," which the Jamaican conflict was just one more battle, from their African experiences; which did lend a fortuneate hand to their struggle, though, as Brown remarks. (163) Brown accentuates this critical point of suggesting that the rebels' action to wage war against the Jamaican elite was simply an expanding and refashioned intercontinental mentailty of conflict that had previously occurred on the African continent, as much as a desperate act of freedom from slavery within the Island's social structure. I was sort of taken aback by this line of reasoning in his arugment.Having always assumsed that the revolt was simply an act against slavery, I was a bit incomplete the more I think about it.  Brown's assertion makes sense. Slaves lives were not just the "childlike" state that had been unfairly placed upon them in their Jamaican environment, but instead, their lives had always been more full, and dramatic, back in Africa, with the full range of human experiences, both good and bad, e.g., war between rival kingdoms, or the push for nation-building, both which battles between the warring  African nations had situated. War was not a new thing for the rebels...Jamaica was just a different geography.

     Yet the rebels were not of an ordinary or random collection of blacks, as Brown repeatedly points out. Instead, the rebels were composed of a special type of African, very special indeed. They belonged to group of Africans known as *Coromantee,* known for their warring abilities back on the African continent. Regarded as the most "soldier-like" of slaves brought to Jamaica, they were very cognizant of sucessful counter-offensive measures to take against an enemy. While prized by the slaveholders for their intense stamina for physical tasks, almost as a status symbol, they were "feared" the most due to their mental strengths. As an example, they took advantage of the natural geography of Jamaica to wage their revolt to their advantage...much as another group rebels did in their struggle...the American Revolution. Tacky (Court) was but one man, an icon for the reistance movement..as there were others would were as equally important in the struggle for freedom, e.g., Wagner, Simon,or even the Obeah "who helped the rebel bands to solidify their unions." (107)

4

Brown’s *Tacky’s Revolt* is a well narrated account of Tacky’s Revolt, as well as the larger revolt (or wars) that occurred in Jamaica in the 18th century. In Brown’s view this revolt, and the subsequent revolts like that led by Wager/Apongo were part of an interconnected series of “wars within wars.” At first while reading this book I assumed the “wars within wars” would be limited to the revolt being situated within the seven year’s war, and then examined for the internal conflicts. However, Brown actually situates the revolts within four wars. He situates this first as a race war, then as a war within the imperial war between Britain and France, then as a part of the broader (West African) slaving wars, and finally as a war amongst the slave community. This was perhaps the greatest feat of the book, as this placement situates the revolt as part of the broader transatlantic struggle.

I think this work, though not my favorite, pairs excellently with out other reads. Throughout this book there appeared to be endless connections between Brown’s work and the other works we’ve read. I was particularly struck by the connections between the historiography of *Tacky’s Revolt* and Trouillot’s points about power in *Silencing the Past*. The first histories of the revolt were recorded by the planters Edward Long and later Brian Edwards. These histories, as Brown points out, created *the* canonical history of the Coromantee War centering Tacky’s revolt and *silencing* the subsequent revolts like the one led by Wager/Apongo. This silencing, as far as I know, is one that continued through to the present day and is only jut now being challenged by works like this one. I certainly had never heard of the revolt lead by Wager/Apongo or of the ways in which this was truly a war in itself.

Additionally this work also calls back to Gomez and Berlin’s in several ways. Brown highlights, continually, the interconnectedness of the Atlantic world and how events beyond the borders of Jamaica effected the Coromantee war and vice versa. In particular Brown highlights how this war was, in many ways, a continuation of the wars occurring in West Africa. This interconnectedness corresponds to the connections Gomez highlights when discussing how African Americans, despite their forceful removal from their homes, retained their cultures and how their lives continued to be affected by what occurred in Africa. These two works also both spend time discussing the ways in which enslaved people created new communities (or ethnicities) in their new locations and how these ethnicities interacted and came to be defined. Similar to Berlin, Brown also highlights the important role that Maroons played both in finding freedom as well as in capturing run-away slaves or suppressing revolts. I have also found it interesting to learn, from both Berlin and Brown, how big a role the literal geographical landscape was to finding or fighting for freedom.

            Parrish’s “The Lives of Slaves,” asked several questions that I found fascinating. One of these was the notion of “types” of slaves. Parrish mentions explicitly the stereotype of “Sambo,” which we have discussed before. However, when thinking about Browns work, I found myself wondering if there was very much of a difference between labelling slaves “Sambo” or “Coromantee” (though I realize the Coromantee was more about a developing ethnic identity, it was an identity that carried a specific stereotype). Another question Parrish raises that I hadn’t considered is how even history from the “bottom up” can create stereotypes or allude to a singular experience among the lower classes when in reality their experiences were varied. I found this an interesting opposition to Berlin’s choice to do history from a more “bottom up” perspective to avoid the same issue.

            It seems to be a habit of mine to end with a quote I found fascinating, and I would hate to break with tradition. Often these quotes help me think through big picture historical or moral questions and have been especially helpful in thinking through my thesis. This week I found this sentence to be especially striking:

“In response, late-eighteenth-century abolitionists would rally around the image of a kneeling supplicant begging to be recognized as a man and a brother, *as if the condemnation of evil required the meek innocence of its victims.*” [emphasis added] (17-18)