

Introduction to Atlantic Approaches on Resistance Against Slavery in the Americas

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This article provides an overview of this thematic collection of four studies focusing on various forms of resistance against slavery in different regions of the Americas. The authors examine unexplored aspects of individual and collective actions led by enslaved men and women, by developing a broad definition of resistance that does not always encompass violence, but also includes cultural and religious forms of resistance. Using several kinds of primary sources and approaching resistance from an Atlantic perspective, the authors examine slave rebellions, runaway slave communities, slave and abolitionist networks, as well as African religious traditions.

KEYWORDS Atlantic perspective, slavery, resistance, rebellion, abolition

Over the last five decades, scholars investigating institutions of slavery started paying more attention to the multiple forms of resistance developed by enslaved men and women in the Americas. Following the pioneer works published in the 1960s and 1970s (Aptheker 1963, 1966; Genovese 1974, 1979; Mullin 1972; Starobin 1970), numerous studies addressed the issue of violent collective resistance against slavery, especially in the USA and the Caribbean (Collison 1997; Egerton 1993; Gomes 2005; Gomes and Reis 1996; Heuman 1994; Hinks 1997; Hoffer 2010; Matthews 2006; Shuler 2009). However, with some welcome exceptions (Barcia 2008, 2012; Childs 2006; Costa 1994; Dubois 2004; Geggus 2001), most recent scholarship that attempts to provide an international perspective to resistance and the fight against slavery also continues to privilege the English-speaking world and the North Atlantic region (Blackburn 2011; Rediker 2012). Employing one model to understand a variety of slave societies, scholars are not always equipped with appropriate tools to interpret primary sources in various languages that could eventually illuminate the international realities they seek to understand. By looking for the inspirations of slave rebellions in facets of revolutionary Europe, historians have also frequently ignored the role

of Africa in the construction of slave insurgency in the Americas. Moreover, by defining resistance as a synonym with rebellion and envisioning the Haitian Revolution as the only successful rebellion in the Americas, most book-length studies barely address the role of everyday forms of individual and collective resistance. As a result, despite their great value, these works fail to discuss cultural forms of resistance and address the role of women in slave resistance.

This thematic collection of articles for the *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* focuses on various forms of resistance against slavery in different regions of the Americas. The authors examine different aspects of individual and collective actions of resistance led by enslaved men and women, most of which remain understudied. Using several kinds of primary sources in English, Portuguese, French, and Spanish, these four articles apply an Atlantic perspective to a variety of forms of resistance, including slave rebellions, runaway slave communities, flights, and abolitionist networks, as well as African religious traditions.

In the first article, “‘An Islamic Atlantic Revolution:’ Dan Fodio’s *Jihād* and Slave Rebellion in Bahia and Cuba, 1804-1844,” Manuel Barcia explores how the Fulani Jihad in the Western Sudan transformed the slave trade in that West African region. He also underscores Jihad’s significant impact on resistance against slavery in Bahia (Brazil) and Cuba. The article shows that the rebellions led mainly by Hausa and especially by Yoruba-speaking enslaved and freed individuals in Bahia and Cuba during the first decades of the nineteenth century were closely connected to their African experience and deeply associated with the Fulani Jihad. Several other scholars previously explored the connections between the Fulani Jihad and the slave uprisings that occurred in Bahia between the two last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century (Lovejoy 1994; Reis 1993; Schwartz 2006; Thornton 1999). Barcia’s new contribution is to compare this rebellious movement to the wave of revolts that took place in Cuba during the same period. With additional comparative research in archives all over the Atlantic world, more details about these connections will very likely be revealed, hopefully allowing analysts to illuminate elements that still remain unclear, including the participation of women in the slave rebellions in Bahia.

Like Barcia, Kalle Kananoja examines the African presence in Latin America, but instead by focusing on cultural and religious resistance. By changing the focus from the Bight of Benin to West Central Africa, Kananoja’s study, entitled “Pai Caetano Angola, Afro-Brazilian Magico-Religious Practices, and Cultural Resistance in Minas Gerais in the Late Eighteenth Century,” discusses the important role of West Central African healers in Minas Gerais (Brazil). His study focuses on the second half of the eighteenth century, when Atlantic slave trade to this Brazilian mining region was at its height. According to *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, 1,100,000 enslaved individuals disembarked in Brazilian slave ports between 1751 and 1800 (Eltis and Halbert 2012). Most of these men, women, and children would be sold in Minas Gerais’ market. Kananoja explores the trajectory of Pai Caetano, a West Central African man. A religious specialist, similar to Domingos Álvares, whose case was recently examined by James H. Sweet (2011), Pai Caetano was persecuted by the Inquisition. Kananoja’s

article sheds light on alternative forms of resistance during the period of the Atlantic slave trade, by underscoring how Catholicism and West African religious practices were amalgamated in the South Atlantic region during the eighteenth century.

Moving from the South Atlantic to the North Atlantic, Maurice Jackson's article, "Washington, DC: From the Founding of a Slaveholding Capital to a Center of Abolitionism," focuses on collective movements promoting the end of slavery in that national capital. By examining a myriad of primary sources, Jackson illuminates the political, cultural, and economic dimensions of the movements against slavery, and demonstrates how blacks and whites, together or separately, fought to end slavery in Washington. The article shows how, before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, the capital city was at the forefront of the abolitionist movement. In addition, by shedding light on the numerous sites of slavery spread all over Washington, Jackson's study contributes to a better understanding of the capital's slave past, which only recently started being addressed in the public sphere.

In the final article of this thematic issue, "Slave Revolt Across Borders," Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie examines slave revolts and legal abolition in the nineteenth-century Americas. The article explores the transnational dimensions of rebellions and abolition, by discussing different kinds of acts of resistance, from larger revolts to small-scale acts led by enslaved individuals. Kerr-Ritchie's study contributes to the analysis of slave revolts and emancipation in the Americas in several ways. First, he explicates the role played by external factors in the fight for freedom. Second, he reassesses the traditional focus on the Haitian Revolution as the exemplary case of successful slave rebellion and reconsiders the role of other Caribbean areas. The study of emancipation in the African diaspora still requires much more work focusing on particular areas, especially in Brazil and Spanish-speaking areas of South America. Nonetheless, Kerr-Ritchie's article further emphasizes the need to examine collective resistance from a transnational perspective in order to understand the extent of movements possibly claiming racial solidarity across segments of the nineteenth-century Americas.

This thematic collection of articles aims to offer a small contribution to the study of transnational movements of resistance against slavery. Despite this effort, the editor (Araujo) and authors (Barcia, Kananoja, Jackson, and Kerr-Ritchie) are aware that many important elements remain to be explored, including the study of slavery, resistance, and emancipation in many areas of South America, like Venezuela and the region of Rio de La Plata (Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil's South). In addition, except for the Caribbean (Finch 2007; Moitt 2001), few studies have explored the role of women in movements of collective resistance, including slave rebellions and runaway slave communities. Also, the links between slave revolts in the Americas and warfare in Africa as examined by Barcia in his study of Cuba and Bahia provides a dimension that deserves to be developed in further works focusing on other areas of the Americas. Finally, further research connecting resistance against slavery in the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean region could certainly contribute to illuminating the study of rebellions in the Americas as well.

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