

# Forschungen

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## Europe and Slave Protests in the Americas (1780–1850)

This article seeks to do two things. The first is to analyse the impact of Europe and especially the French Revolution on the shape and aims of slave protest in the New World; and the second is to point to possible comparisons between the protests of European labour and of slaves in the Americas in this period.

### The Impact of the French Revolution

The French Revolution and subsequent revolutionary upheavals in St Domingue (Haiti) between 1791 and 1804 have been seen as inaugurating a dramatic change in the history of slave revolts, at least in the Atlantic World. According to Eugene Genovese,

“The conquest of state power by representatives of the consolidating bourgeoisie in France decisively transformed the ideological and economic terrain ... [and] provided the conditions, in which a massive revolt in St Domingue could become a revolution in its own right ... [It] marked a turning point in the history of slave revolts and, indeed, of the human spirit ... Henceforth, slaves increasingly aimed not at secession from the dominant society but at joining it on equal terms”.<sup>1</sup>

He continues, “By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the historical content of slave revolts shifted decisively from attempts to secure freedom from slavery to attempts to overthrow slavery as a social system” and sees this reflected in the fact that the Haitian revolution “did not aspire to restore some lost African world or build an isolated Afro-American enclave”. From Genovese’s point of view, slave revolts were now inspired by a “modern ideology”, by “the universalist claims of the Rights of Man” rather than an “Afro-American religious call to holy war”.<sup>2</sup> This transition he, like Michael Craton, also associates with a transition from African-dominated to creole-led slave revolts.<sup>3</sup>

1 Eugene D. Genovese: *From Rebellion to Revolution. Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*, Baton Rouge 1992, p. xix–xx.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 88, 93 and 123.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 98–100. The creolisation of slave revolt is the central thesis of Michael Craton: *Testing the Chains. Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, Ithaca 1982.

The present paper wishes to dispute these claims on the grounds that slave revolts before 1789 were not simple attempts to restore 'Africa', that post-1789 slave revolts (as distinct from mixed-race liberal and independence movements) in many places, for example Brazil, remained dominated by African-born slaves, that the relationship between ideological models ('religious call to holy war' versus 'Rights of Man') and the motives of rebellious slaves were at the very least unclear and that this was even true in the case of Haiti itself.

Firstly and most obviously, there can be no doubt that the historically unparalleled ability of slaves in St Domingue to seize and retain power was intrinsically bound to the wars and upheavals unleashed by the French Revolution. Crucially Toussaint l'Ouverture was able to exploit the space created by almost twenty continuous years of colonial struggles between France, Spain and Britain, between metropolitan France and colonial whites, and between whites and mulattoes on the island to create a disciplined army of slaves and end their servitude; and these conflicts he exploited with a breath-taking – and completely unscrupulous – brilliance. Moreover the Napoleonic attempt to restore slavery to the island recreated the alliance between African and creole slaves (slaves born in St Domingue), which had otherwise been severely fractured. Of course, there was nothing new in the coincidence of slave revolt with breaches in public order and social control. In fact throughout the history of slave societies, major risings were dependent on ruptures of social control, sometimes caused by pirates in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, by conflicts between French, Spanish, Portuguese, British and Dutch military and naval forces, and by conflicts within the white colonial elites themselves. Secondly, the intellectual provenance of Toussaint's views was indubitably located in the ideas of the French Enlightenment and Revolution. He deployed the vocabulary of "French citizens", detested voodoo and what he saw as Unchristian superstition, and in his famous letter of 5 November 1797 to the Directory spoke of the "sublime morality" of the French. He wanted "liberty and equality" to rule in St Domingue.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it was French troops, who brought to the island in 1794 news that the Assembly had abolished slavery; and when Napoleon sent troops to restore that hated institution, Haiti's blacks – according to some reports – responded not only with force of arms but also by singing the *Marseillaise* and *Ça Ira*.<sup>5</sup> It is equally clear that slave revolt and success in St Domingue had a profound effect on other slave societies. The movements of sailors and troops around the Caribbean and coastal areas of the Americas spread news of black victories. At the same time white émigré landowners from Haiti took their slaves to new lands; and in some cases these slaves then participated in slave risings in their new homes, as in a Jamaican conspiracy of 1799 and in the USA in 1811.<sup>6</sup> The revolt in St Domingue was followed by upheavals in St Lucia, Guadeloupe and

4 The classic account of the Haiti revolution is C. L. R. James: *Black Jacobins*, London 2001 (reprint). More recent, significant work includes Carolyn E. Flick: *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, Knoxville 1990; David Patrick Geggus: *Slave Resistance Studies and the Saint-Domingue Revolution*, Miami 1983. On the specifics of Toussaint's views see James, pp. 20, 160 and 176.

5 James, pp. 116 and 257f.

6 Genovese, pp. 19, 43 and 94; Joān José Reis: *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, Baltimore 1993, p. 48; David Barry Gaspar: *Bondsmen and Rebels. A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua*, Durham (North Carolina) 1993.

Martinique, a slave rising in Tortola, and a mass exodus of slaves from their plantations in Cayenne (French Guyana) in the 1790s. In 1795 the rebellious slaves of Coro in Venezuela, who were in contact with French sailors, are reported to have based their claims to freedom on “the law of the French, the Republic” and to have demanded “Liberty for Slaves”.<sup>7</sup> In Brazil three years later a conspiracy in the gold-mining city of Ouro Preto (the *Inconfidência Mineira*) and the Tailors’ Revolt in Bahia were also inspired by the discourse of the French Revolution and events in Haiti. An urban rising in Recife in 1823/24 even produced the following refrain:

“Let us imitate Christophe,  
The immortal Haitian.  
Eia! Imitate his deeds,  
O my sovereign people”.<sup>8</sup>

There are further reports of Trinidadian slaves wearing tricolours and singing the *Marseillaise*.<sup>9</sup> According to C. L. R. James, the slaves of St Domingue destroyed black feelings of inferiority forever<sup>10</sup>; whilst Herbert Klein writes,

“as for the slaves of America, the Haitian revolution provided a vital example of a movement for freedom which could succeed against all the odds ... in all American societies the black and mulatto workers, free and slave, were inspired by the Haitian example”.<sup>11</sup>

Genovese finds this truth repeated in slave revolts in the USA: in Southern Louisiana in 1811, in which some of the leaders were free mulattos from St Domingue, and in Nat Turner’s 1831 revolt in Southampton County, Virginia. Gabriel Prosser’s conspiracy in Richmond, Virginia, aimed at nothing less than the abolition of slavery and the creation of an independent Negro state.<sup>12</sup> All three instances, together with Denmark Vesey’s conspiracy in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1822, were, in Genovese’s view, an amalgam of “religious appeals to the slaves” and “the accents of the French Revolution”.<sup>13</sup> In fact, in the event of failure Prosser seems to have expected to set sail to Haiti.<sup>14</sup>

Equally consistent with arguments about a transformation in the nature of slave revolts after 1789 is the fact that many earlier forms of dissent and protest failed to attack slavery as an institution but rather sought freedom for some slaves, often at the expense of others. There was certainly nothing new about slave resistance. Indeed, wherever there was slavery, a variety of survival strategies were developed by the slaves, which incorporated both accommodation

7 James, p. 66; Genovese, p. 94; Robin Blackburn: *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, London 1998, pp. 169 and 338; Herbert S. Klein: *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Oxford 1986, pp. 108, 131 and 207.

8 Klein, p. 207; Blackburn, pp. 384f. and 406f.

9 Genovese, p. 94.

10 James, p. 198.

11 Klein, p. 98.

12 Genovese, pp. 4 and 43ff.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

and resistance, often in simultaneous and complicated combination. Some forms of resistance were individual: from feigned illness and weeping to theft, suicide, abortion and infanticide. Physical attacks on owners and their agents, individual acts of disobedience and arson were not unknown, though they were much more effective when they were collective, as this made punishment more difficult. Individual flight was common, though often it involved only short absences and little more than visits to friends and family, which most owners learned to tolerate. Sometimes collective flight might aim at specific improvements in plantation conditions, e.g. at increasing the time slaves could work on their own behalf. In such cases the action of slaves is best understood as economic bargaining, as an equivalent of strike action. Other fugitives, single or collective, had longer-term ambitions – to find a new master, to move to a less oppressive jurisdiction, to join a colony of runaway slaves or even to board ship to Africa. In these cases, however, the collusion of other slaves was usually a prerequisite of success. Forms of collective slave protest included arson, the laming of animals and the destruction of tools (again acts of economic bargaining, not unlike Luddism in Europe), the formation of colonies of fugitives (of which much more anon), and most spectacularly slave insurrections. Genovesé is in fact well aware that there was nothing new about slave revolts in themselves. In fact they had begun in the slave entrepôts on the West African coast (*barracoons*), whence enslaved Africans were transported to the New World, and were also not unknown on the ships that carried them thither. In the Americas examples of slave insurrection are known from 1522, when African slaves massacred their masters in the city of Santo Domingo. Fifteen years later a slave conspiracy was discovered in Mexico City and in 1540 slave fisherman on the island of Santa Margherita rose against their owners. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century slave insurrections characterised the silver-mining camps of Northern Mexico and the copper mines of Peru, whilst there were aborted plots and rebellions in Barbados in 1649 and 1675. For most of the same century a huge colony of runaway slaves (*quilombo* or ‘maroon society’) at Palmares in Brazil survived numerous attacks from Portuguese and colonial armies. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century all major urban centres in Latin America and the Caribbean experienced slave revolts.<sup>15</sup> In 1712, for exam-

15 The literature on slave resistance in Latin America and the Caribbean is now massive. On Brazil see Carlo Maria Junho Anastasia/Flávio Marcus da Silva: *Levantamentos Secentistas Mineiros*, in: Júnia Furtado (ed.): *Diálogos Oceânicos*, Belo Horizonte 2001, pp. 307–35; Marcus Joaquim M. de Carvalho: *Liberdade*, Recife 2001; Décio Freitas: *Insurreições Escravos*, Porto Alegre 1976; R. K. Kent: *African Revolt in Bahia*, in: *Journal of Social History*, 3 (1969/70), pp. 334–56; Silvia Hunold Lara: *Campos da Violência*, Rio de Janeiro 1988; Douglas Cole Libby/Eduardo França Paiva: *A Escravidão no Brasil*, São Paulo 2000, pp. 45–56; Clóvis Moura: *Rebeliões na Senzala*, Rio de Janeiro 1972; Reis: *Slave Rebellion*; João José Reis/Flávio Santos Gomes (eds.): *Liberdade por um fio*, São Paulo 1996; João José Reis/Eduardo Silva: *Negociação e Conflito*, São Paulo 1999; Stuart Schwartz (ed.): *Slaves, Peasants and Rebels*, Chicago 1996.

On Latin America more generally see Klein, pp. 189–215. Also David M. Davidson: *Negro Slave Resistance and Control in Colonial Mexico*, in: Richard Price (ed.): *Maroon Societies*, Baltimore 1996, pp. 82–104; Wilfredo Kapsoli Escudero: *Rebeliones de esclavos en el Perú*, Lima 1990; Manual Vicente Magallanes: *Luchas e insurrecciones en la Venezuela colonial*, Caracas 1972. On Barbados see Hilary Beckles: *Natural Rebels*, London 1989 and *Black Rebellion in Barbados*, Bridgetown 1984. For Antigua see Gaspar: *Bondsmen*. On Jamaica see Craton: *Testing the Chains*; Richard Hart: *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery*, Kingston 2002; and Werner Zips: *Black Rebels*, Kingston 1999. For Palmares and other maroon societies see footnote 17.

ple, there was a slave revolt in New York City and a further US conspiracy at Stono in South Carolina in 1739. The first open revolts in Guyana erupted in the 1720s and continued to the 1770s. The 1730s saw disturbances in St John in the Danish Virgin islands, Antigua and Guadeloupe, whilst Jamaica was locked in almost continuous ‘Maroon Wars’ from the 1670s to the 1730s, and again later in the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

The classic form of collective slave resistance was the formation of communities of run-away slaves (*quilombos*, *mocambos* in Portuguese, *cumbes*, *palenques* and *mambises* in Spanish), now commonly described as ‘maroon societies’. These were of many and various kinds, and were endemic in the swamps, hills and forests of Brazil, Guyana, Surinam and Jamaica. There were even a few in the Southern USA, though here both the terrain and the size and strength of the local white community, as well as the hostility of native Indians, restricted their number and size in most areas of the country. Some maroon societies were of short duration, mobile and rapacious, often themselves taking slaves. An especially bleak manifestation of the fact that fugitive slaves were not necessarily opposed to slavery as an institution was provided by the Brazilian *quilombo* of Buraco de Tatú (the ‘Armadillo’s Lair’) just to the North of the city of Salvador in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: over a period of twenty years it lived off theft and extortion, and its prime victims were blacks. Other maroon communities were of longer duration, as in the most famous case of Palmares in North Eastern Brazil, which at its peak housed some 12,000 slaves, engaged in agricultural pursuits and established contacts with local merchants, though here too captured slaves remained slaves – until they found slaves to replace themselves. To many fugitive communities African religious practices were central, whilst their political and social organisation sometimes reflected tribal rivalries (though sometimes not) and was structured along roughly African lines – or, at least, a ‘nostalgia for Africa’ – with leaders described as ‘Kings’, some of whom actually had been leaders in their African homeland before their enslavement. In the eyes of Roger Bastide and R. K. Kent, Palmares and similar maroon societies constituted African resistance to acculturation. Slaves in such communities utilised the skills they had learnt in their African homelands; and, to quote John Thornton, “the most important contributions of the African heritage were the military training that the slaves had, mostly from having served in African armies.” Their African background, again following Thornton, “did help shape the direction of revolts, influenced timing and tactics, and validated leadership”.<sup>17</sup> It is for this reason that Klein describes

16 On slave revolts in the USA see Genovese, pp. 4 and 43ff; Herbert Aptheker: Maroons within the Present Limits of the USA, in: Price: Maroon Societies, pp. 151–68; Eugene D. Genovese: Roll Jordan, Roll, New York 1974; James Haskins: Building a New Land, Amistad 2001; John R. McKivigan (ed.): Antislavery Violence, Tennessee 1999; Thomas Wentworth Higginson: Black Rebellion, New York 1998 (reprint); Gerald W. Mullin: Flight and Rebellion. Slave Resistance in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Virginia, New York 1972. More generally see footnote 15 and Section VI (Resistance) of Stanley Engermann/Seymour Drescher/Robert Paquette: Slavery, Oxford 2001, pp. 295–370. Also John Thornton: Africa and Africans in the Making of the Modern World, Cambridge 1998, pp. 272–303.

17 The classic collection of essays on maroon societies is Richard Price: Maroon Societies. For the West Indies see Mavis C. Campbell: The Maroons of Jamaica, Granby (Mass.) 1988; Emilia Viotti da Costa: Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demarara Slave Rebellion of 1823, New York 1994; Gad Heumann (ed.): Out of the House of Africa: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World, London 1982; Vim Hoogbergen: The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname, Leiden 1990;

the aims of most runaway slaves as “conservative”.<sup>18</sup> This perception seems to be further validated in those cases (Jamaica in the 1730s and Surinam in the 1770s), where the military success of maroon communities was so great that the colonial powers were compelled to conclude peace treaties with the rebellious slaves. For a central part of these treaties was the agreement of the maroons to cease hostilities and return any future runaway slaves to their masters. Moreover, incidences of African maroons enslaving or murdering Native Americans were relatively common (though relations between the two groups varied enormously from time to time and place to place); and in general it is clear that maroons placed the survival of their own communities “well ahead of ending slavery or helping later runaways escape”.<sup>19</sup> Of course, individual strategies of survival were no more aimed at the eradication of slavery as an institution, whilst temporary flight to exact concessions from owners constituted a form of collective bargaining and aimed at the amelioration of the slave condition rather than its abolition.

So Genovese appears to be right when he claims that slave revolts before 1789 rarely attacked the institution of slavery as such, that African religious and political precedents played a major role at this stage and that conversely the French Revolution subsequently found its slave imitators, who deployed its discourse and attempted to create a qualitatively new society. However, each step in this narrative of change is problematical. Firstly the view that slave resistance before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was essentially ‘restorationist’ and rehearsed African tribal precedents contains at best a half-truth. Even in the great *quilombos* like Palmares, and even as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, economic and social organisation mirrored that of no single African tribe. Rather it was the consequence of an amalgamation of different tribal traditions, forged on the slave ships or in the new American homeland, in which European and Native American influences can also be detected from the earliest days. This was especially so, as there was a considerable Amerindian input into many maroon societies. In Cuba Africans and Indians co-operated in the anti-Spanish wars of the 1520s, whilst mixed slave/Indian communities inhabited the Orinoco Valley in Venezuela and the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua. Moreover recent Brazilian research has identified not only a considerable Indian pres-

E. Kofi Agorsah (ed.): *Maroon Heritage*, Kingston 1994; Orlando Patterson: *Slavery and Slave Revolts*, in: Price, pp. 246–92; Francisco Pérez de la Riva: *Cuban Palenques*, in: Price, pp. 49–59; Richard Price: *The Guiana Maroons*, Baltimore 1976. On maroons in Brazil see Pedro Paulo de Abreu Funari: *A arqueologia de Palmares*, in: Reis/Gomes, pp. 26–51; Roger Bastide: *The Other Quilombos*, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 191–201; Marcus Joaquim M. de Carvalho: *O quilombo de Malunguinho*, in: Reis/Gomes, pp. 407–32; Décio Freitas: *Palmares, Porto Alegre 1973*; Flávio dos Santos Gomes: *Quilombos do Rio de Janeiro*, in: Reis/Gomes, pp. 263–90; Mary C. Karasch: *Os quilombos do ouro na capitania de Goiás*, in: Reis/Gomes, pp. 240–62; R. K. Kent: *Palmares*, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 170–90; Clóvis Moura: *Quilombos e a rebeldia negra*, São Paulo 1981; Donal Ramos: *O quilombo e o sistema escravista em Minas Gerais*, in: Reis/Gomes, pp. 164–92; Stuart B. Schwartz: *The Mocambo*, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 202–26; Stuart B. Schwartz: *Cantos e quilombos numa conspiração de escravos haussás – Bahia, 1814*, in: Reis/Gomes, pp. 373–406. In the rest of Latin America, Aquiles Escalante: *Palenques in Colombia*, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 74–81; José L. Franco: *Maroons and Slave Rebellions in the Spanish Territories*, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 35–48; Manuel Moreno Fraginals (ed.): *Africa in Latin America*, New York 1984; and Thornton: *Africa*, pp. 280f. for quotations.

<sup>18</sup> Klein, p. 198.

<sup>19</sup> Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 119–24; Klein: pp. 203 f., Quotation from Thornton, p. 292.

ence in Palmares but cases of *quilombos* in the state of Mato Grosso in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where Native Americans led or constituted a majority of their inhabitants. A slave conspiracy of 1814 in Bahia even saw its leaders promising to restore to the local Indians land that had been taken from them by the white colonists.<sup>20</sup> Moreover Stuart Schwartz sees Brazilian *quilombos* as representing not a return to an African pastoral system but as “parasitic, based on highway thefts, cattle rustling, raiding and extortion”, as the product of wild frontier conditions.<sup>21</sup> As Carolyn Flick shows in the case of Haiti and Marcus de Carvalho in the case of Pernambuco in North-Eastern Brazil, African slaves in the New World did not simply reproduce their distinct African ethnic cultures but rather created a syncretism of Dahomean, Yoruban and West-Central African cultures.<sup>22</sup> To quote Richard Price, an authority on maroon societies,

“However ‘African’ in character, no maroon social, political, religious or aesthetic *system* can be reliably traced back to a particular tribal provenience; they reveal, rather, their syncretistic composition, forged in the early meetings of peoples bearing diverse African, European and Amerindian cultures in the dynamic setting of the new world.”<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the cultures of the African societies, from which the slaves were taken, were in no sense static; and in many cases they had already been influenced by contact with Europeans and European cultures. For example, some slaves came to the New World already speaking proto-creole languages and converted to Africanised forms of Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, even on the slave-ships of the Middle Passage new bonds were created between Africans of different origins; and in Jamaica the term ‘shipmate’ became synonymous with ‘brother and sister’, according to some accounts. This solidarity of transportees on the Atlantic crossing could even form the basis of a maroon society, as in the case of the *quilombo* of Catucá near Recife in the first half of the nineteenth century; for this was also known as Malunguinho (*malungo* means companion on the same slave ship in Portuguese). Once in the Americas some slaves not previously exposed to strong European influences nonetheless seem to have developed through necessity a common creole language with remarkable rapidity – within the first two decades of the foundation of the colony of Surinam, for example. Some maroon societies followed syncretic Christian cults and, according to Dutch reports, there was a well-kept Christian chapel in Palmares.<sup>25</sup> In consequence, the ‘Africanness’ of maroon societies was far from undiluted.

Secondly, the nomenclature of authority within some maroon societies seems to have undergone a Westernisation long before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In an important runaway slave community near Cartagena in 1604, its leader ruled in conjunction with a number of offi-

20 Price: *Maroon Societies*, p. 29; Thornton, p. 286; Abreu Funari, in: *Reis/Gomes*, pp. 26–51; Luiza Rios Ricci Volpato: *Quilombos em Mato Grosso*, in: *Reis/Gomes*, pp. 213–39; Klein, p. 201; Schwartz, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, p. 212; Schwartz, in: *Reis/Gomes*, pp. 373–406.

21 Schwartz, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, p. 211; Carlos Magno Guimarães: *Mineração, quilombos e Palmares – Minas Gerais no século XVIII*, in: *Reis/Gomes*, pp. 139–63.

22 Flick: *Making of Haiti*; Carvalho, in: *Reis/Gomes*.

23 Price: *Maroon Societies*, p. 29.

24 Thornton, pp. 8, 213–218 and 269.

25 Craton, p. 23; Thornton, pp. 153–62 and 192–205; Carvalho, in: *Reis/Gomes*, pp. 407–432.

cials with Spanish titles: a 'captain general', a 'treasurer', a 'war lieutenant' (*teniente de guerra*) and a 'bailiff' (*alguazil mayor*). Better known, in Jamaica from 1700 'Kings' were replaced by 'colonels' and 'captains'.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, however 'conservative' or 'restorationist' the aims of fugitive slaves may have been, the very existence of maroon societies constituted a threat to the dominance of the slave-owners and an example to other slaves that flight and resistance were possible. It was precisely because *quilombos* constituted such a threat to the prevailing ideology and reality of social dominance that colonial and post-colonial societies sought to repress them with the most brutal military force. Some maroon activity unleashed mass risings of slaves, as in Jamaica, Demarara and Venezuela; and the aim in some of these risings was to eliminate violently all whites and create island-wide or large-scale black polities. This was the case, for example, in Tacky's rebellion in Jamaica in 1760; and in a conspiracy in Antigua in 1736, in which Coramantee (Akan) and creole slaves aimed to create a new government after eliminating the island's whites. The extent to which creoles participated in such revolts, even at this point in time, was clearly a function of the extent to which slave societies remained dependent (or not) on the importation of Africans. Where natural reproduction replaced importation, there creole leadership was much more likely, as in the Barbados revolt of 1816, when less than 8% of the island's slave population was born in Africa. It is also quite clear that maroon societies had a hugely symbiotic relationship with both local Indians and local whites, which in some cases involved complex commercial relationships; and that they engaged in 'politics' and 'diplomacy' in the forging of alliances. They were not isolated Africas in a foreign desert and in some cases joined forces with general rebellions of the poor and dispossessed, including Indians, as in the *Balaiada* revolt (1838–1841) in the Brazilian state of Maranhão.<sup>27</sup>

Conversely slave revolts in the largest slave society of all (Brazil) remained dominated by the African-born until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which is scarcely surprising, given the relative absence of natural reproduction amongst the local slave population and the continued importation of *circa* 1.75 million Africans between 1800 and 1850. Here African culture did not just survive. It was constantly rejuvenated. Not only that but after 1798 mulattos were actually less likely (*pace* Genovese) to participate in Brazilian *slave* revolts, at least in the North East of the country. They did join various mixed race political and social movements for liberal reform, independence (from Portugal or later the rest of Brazil) and later abolitionism; but in the nine Bahian slave revolts of 1807 to 1835, the leaders and the led were African-born and in some cases inspired, as in the great Mâle rising of 1835, by African versions of Islam.<sup>28</sup> For Stuart Schwartz this indicates that the war against slavery in North Eastern Brazil was "a war led almost exclusively by African slaves and by those freed persons of Afri-

26 Thornton, p. 294; Price: Maroon Societies, p. 20.

27 Genovese, pp. 33ff; Schwartz, in: Reis/Gomes, p. 21; Gaspar: Bondsmen; Beckles, p. 19. All of the articles in Reis and Gomes stress interactions between *quilombos* and the rest of Brazilian society. See, for example, those by Volpato and Guimarães cited above. On 1814 see Schwartz in the same volume, p. 21 and on the *Balaiada* see Assunção in *ibid.*, p. 22.

28 For the historiography of slave revolts in Brazil see footnote 15 above. On the absence of Brazilian born slaves see Libby/Paiva, p. 56; Reis: Slave Rebellion, pp. 14 and 54; Stuart B. Schwartz: Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society, Cambridge 1985, pp. 474–77.



can birth for whom ethnicity was more vital than juridical status”.<sup>29</sup> To reformulate this point, the extent to which slave revolts embraced a universalist discourse depended much more on the origins of the local slave community and its ability to engage with Europeans and their languages than on the specific advent of the French Revolution, though revolutionary discourse did become relevant to large numbers of slaves of mixed origin, who participated in various emancipationist movements. To the slave participants of the Brazilian Urubu Quilombo revolt in 1826, on the other hand, led by a self-proclaimed ‘King of the Blacks’, universal human rights scarcely featured in the call for ‘Death to the Whites’.

In any case, the ‘Afro-American holy war’ and ‘Rights of Man’ dichotomy deployed by Genovese is a false one. He himself admits that Africa was not completely absent from slave risings and conspiracies in the USA after 1800, writing that Gabriel Prosser “to his cost” slighted the folk religion of the country slaves, who “retained stronger links to their African past”.<sup>30</sup> The rebels of 1811 in Charleston used African charms to protect themselves against their enemies, Denmark Vesey mixed Christian and African discourses and Nat Turner may have expected to form a large maroon society in the Dismal Swamp.<sup>31</sup> Similar points could be made – but even more forcibly – about the Revolution in Haiti. Certainly Toussaint and other military leaders of his background were formed intellectually by the French Enlightenment. They had read the *philosophes* and knew the work of ‘The Friends of the Negro’ and of the Abbé Raynal.<sup>32</sup> However, this was scarcely true of the great majority of slaves who rose on the Northern Plain of St Domingue in 1791 and inaugurated the island’s revolution with the massacre of 2,000 whites. (Five times as many slaves died in this vicious struggle.) The great majority of these slaves were of African origin. They were called to arms at the onset of the rising by Boukman, an African priest, and by a Voodoo incantation, i.e. by a culture that the Christian Toussaint and his fellow commanders detested. As C. L. R. James tells us “Voodoo was the medium of the revolution”.<sup>33</sup> Given that another of the revolutionary leaders, Jean François, said of the slaves in the revolutionary army that they could “not speak two words of French”<sup>34</sup>, it is at the very least quite likely that the struggle of black – or rather, African-born – slaves for their freedom in St Domingue was theorised, *if* it was theorised at all, in African rather than French accents. This point is reinforced by new understandings of the role of Haitian maroons in the revolt. The view of Gabriel Debien and Yvan Debbatsch that the revolution on St Domingue owed nothing to the island’s maroon communities (seen as representing a different and more African tradition) has been forsaken by more recent accounts (from David Geggus, Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Carolyn Flick), which stress the symbolic and practical significance of maroon communities for resistance. Concrete examples of collusion between *some* maroons and Toussaint’s armies can also be demonstrated. Furthermore in areas of Haiti liberated by the rebels, Congolese models were followed in the election of

29 Schwartz: Plantations, p. 479.

30 Genovese: From Rebellion, p. 46.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 46 and 49.

32 See footnote 4 above.

33 James, pp. 14f. and 91; Klein, pp. 208ff.

34 Quoted in: James, p. 84.

'Kings' and 'Queens' to rule. Moreover, an investigation of the relationship between the creole leadership around Toussaint and the African-born slaves throws up some disturbing facts for those who lionise this remarkable man. The slave revolt of 1791 did see African and creole collaboration, forged by the hostility of Haiti's white elite to mulatto recognition. However, only two months after the inception of the revolt, Biassou and Jean-François, two creole leaders of the revolt, displayed a willingness to return their African cousins to slavery in return for creole pardons. Clashes between the two groups became increasingly common, leading at one stage to an African-led revolt against Toussaint's plans effectively to restore servitude, but under creole masters, in response to General Leclerc's French invasion of 1801. It was African slaves, not Toussaint and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who refused to accept Leclerc's terms. It was only Napoleon's refusal to compromise, which led the creole leadership to turn again to its armies of African-born slaves to repulse the French for good. As Thornton writes, "the postrevolutionary period was a partially successful creole (and mullato) counterrevolution directed at African culture as well as against the former African slaves".<sup>35</sup> These tragic divisions were not peculiar to St Domingue and were in fact foreshadowed in the Jamaican conspiracy of 1692, in which creoles planned to kill the island's Europeans and assume their offices, leaving the African-born in their servitude.<sup>36</sup> Conversely in the Mâle rising in North Eastern Brazil in 1835 the rebels identified their enemies as both the whites and, though less frequently, the creoles and mulattos.<sup>37</sup>

The above leads me to conclude that throughout the history of slave societies, slaves have adopted a variety of survival strategies, which "usually reflected a realistic assessment of the daunting forces arrayed against them".<sup>38</sup> For many slaves, especially light-skinned mulattos with skills and speaking the language of the colonialist in Brazil and Cuba, where manumission was relatively common, the least dangerous strategy was to aim to accumulate capital to purchase manumission. Similarly some black African women found their freedom through sexual liaisons with their masters and bearing their masters' children, however brutal and rapacious their masters may have been. (African women constituted the largest single cohort of manumitted slaves in Brazil by the eighteenth century, though this may have had more to do with their economic activities as street vendors, i.e. with their income, than with sexual strategies of mobility.) On the other hand African-born males in Brazil stood scarcely any chance of manumission. Hence their dominance in the slave revolts of the early-19<sup>th</sup> century should not surprise.<sup>39</sup>

35 Gabriel Debien: *Maronnage in the French Caribbean*, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 107–134; Gabriel Debien: *Les esclaves aux Antilles Françaises, Fort-de-France 1974*; Yvan Debbasch: *Le Maniel: Further Notes*, in: Price: *Maroon Societies*, pp. 143–8; Geggus: *Slave Resistance*; Flick: *Making Michelle-Rolph Trouillot: Ti Difé sou Isoua Ayiti, Brooklyn 1977*. On Congolese precedents see Thornton, p. 326, who also – pp. 33f. – repeats the highly critical account of Toussaint in Pierre Pluchon: *Toussaint l'Ouverture*, Paris 1979, pp. 151–380.

36 Thornton, p. 302.

37 João José Reis/P. F. de Moraes Farias: *Islam and Slave Rebellion Bahia, Brazil*, in: *Islam et sociétés au sud du Sahara*, 3 (1989), p. 56.

38 Engerman et al., p. 296.

39 On patterns of manumission in Brazil see Libby/Paiva: *A Escravidão*; Laird A. Bergad: *Slavery and the Demographic History of Minas Gerais*, Cambridge 1999; Tarcísio Rodrigues Botelho et al.: *História quantitativa e serial no Brasil*, Belo Horizonte 2001; Mary C. Karasch: *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro*,

Where opportunities for flight were facilitated by dense forest, high mountains and swamps, there many slaves continued to flee to *quilombos* long after the French Revolution and its message, as in many parts of Brazil in the 1870s and 1880s. In Antigua, on the other hand, where the destruction of the forests reduced the possibilities of flight, slaves moved to revolt long before 1789, as in the case of the conspiracy of 1736. Moreover, here, as in the Barbados revolt in 1816, the dominant role of creoles reflected native demographic and cultural changes within the slave community.<sup>40</sup> In short, routes out of servitude and discourses of freedom were ever present in slave societies, whilst the possibility of their realisation depended upon conjuncture and local circumstance. In the USA the large size and power of the white community made both maroon communities and slave risings relatively rare, whilst natural reproduction amongst slaves replaced the need for African imports and distanced the slaves from African cultures in a way that could not happen in Brazil before 1850. Under these circumstances the deployment of Biblical texts by US slaves and the legal discourse of abolitionism become comprehensible. The language of the French Revolution and the example of Haiti, therefore, constituted but one strand in a multiplicity of strategies to freedom, even after 1800.

## Comparisons

It is clear from the above that there are multiple points of possible comparison between European labour protests on the one hand and the strategies of survival adopted by slaves in the Americas on the other. For example, historians of slavery in the Americas and historians of European labour have both become aware that many workers and many slaves never sought to improve their circumstances through collective action and protest. In Europe some sought to improve their life chances through changing job or changing employer. Others found collaboration with employers the best way to higher rewards, as in the case of those, who lived in company housing, joined company unions and belonged to company insurance schemes or workers, whose remuneration improved with length of service.<sup>41</sup> For a significant number of slaves in Brazil and Spanish America, especially Cuba (though not for the USA or the French

Princeton 1987; Eduardo França Paiva: *Escravos e libertos nas Minas Gerais*, São Paulo 2000; A. J. R. Russell-Wood: *The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil*, Oxford 2002; Sydney Chaloub: *Slavery, Freedmen and the Politics of Freedom in Brazil*, in: *Slavery and Abolition*, 10 (1989), no. 3, pp. 64–84; Douglas Cole Libby/Clotilde Andrade Paiva: *Manumission Practices in a Late Eighteenth-Century Brazilian Slave Parish*, in: *Slavery and Abolition*, 21 (2000), 1, pp. 96–127. On the social mobility of African slave women see Júnia Ferreira Furtado: *Chica da Silva*, São Paulo 2000 and *Ibid.* (ed.): *Pérolas Negras* in Furtado, pp. 81–125. For a more hostile account of the relationship between masters and female slaves see Kathleen J Higgins: *Licentious Liberty in a Brazilian Gold-Mining Region*, University Park 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Gaspar: *Bondsmen*; Beccles, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> European labour historians have become increasingly aware of the factors and issues, which divide workers, as well as those, which unite them. In particular it is clear that the formation of ‘class’ solidarity is extremely difficult and that, even where it has existed, it has been extremely brittle. For summaries of much of the literature see Dick Geary: *Working-Class Identities in Europe. 1850s–1930s*, in: *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45 (1999), 1, pp. 20–34; and Dick Geary: *Labour History, the Linguistic Turn and Postmodernism*, in: *Contemporary European History* 9 (2000), 3, pp. 445–62.

and British Caribbean, where manumission was much less common), many slaves would adopt not dissimilar strategies. They would seek to avoid trouble, aspire to specialised employment and aim to accumulate sufficient capital to buy their freedom. Such a strategy, with freedom as its goal, was only open to some slaves, however. In the case of Brazil, for example, male Brazilian-born slaves, who spoke some Portuguese, possessed skills and were usually mulatto, stood some chance of earning or buying their freedom. African women were also disproportionately represented amongst the manumitted, possibly because those who worked as street vendors were able to accumulate sufficient capital to buy their freedom, whilst others gained their freedom as a result of liaisons with their white masters. On the other hand African-born males were almost completely absent from the ranks of the *libertos*. This strategy of eventual manumission was never reliable, depended upon the whim of owners and could be cut short by early mortality.<sup>42</sup> Individual – as distinct from collective – acts of resistance, understood in a very broad sense, can also be found amongst both slaves and European workers: pilferage, physical attacks on owners or employers, arson.<sup>43</sup> However, there were important strategies on the part of slaves, which did not really form part of European labour's repertoire of resistance and *vice versa*. For example, slaves could not simply leave their job, as could some, though by no means all, European workers. However, some slaves did flee from their owners illegally to seek new masters. It is much more difficult to construe suicide, abortion and the infanticide of boys as 'resistance' in the European case. Under the conditions of slavery, however, they can be so construed and there has been a great deal of work on 'gynaecological resistance'.<sup>44</sup>

In the case of both slaves and wage workers collective action and consciousness was the exception rather than the rule. It could be prevented by violence and intimidation, especially in slave society, or thwarted by legal restrictions, as in Europe for most of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, just as there were conflicts between African and American-born slaves in the New World, so ethnic divisions often undermined solidarity in Europe, as did the fissures of skill, gender and religion.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless in particular circumstances, especially when conventions and expectations were breached by slave owners in the New World or employers in Europe, forms of collective protest did emerge. These were extremely varied and those of slaves sometimes mirrored those of manufacturing workers in Europe: laming animals and damaging tools served the same purpose as did Luddite actions, for example, and of-

42 On manumission strategies see the literature in footnote 39 above.

43 For discussions of individual slave strategies, pilferage etc. see Libby/Paiva, *Escravidão*, pp. 45–56; and Reis/Silva, *Negociação*, passim. For a European example see the articles in Richard J Evans (ed.): *The German Working Class*, London 1992.

44 On 'gynaecological resistance' see Hilary McD. Beckles: *Natural Rebels*, London 1989; Hilary McD. Beckles: *Centering Women*, Kingston 1999; Verene Shepherd et al.: *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, Kingston 1995; Barry Gaspar et al.: *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, Bloomington 1996; Lucille Mathurin: *The Rebel Woman in the West Indies during Slavery*, Kingston 1975; Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society*, London 1990.

45 The non-participation of creole slaves in Brazilian slave revolts is central to Reis: *Slave Rebellion* and Reis/Silva: *Negociação*. See also the literature in footnotes 15, 35, 36 and 37 above. On various kinds of divisions within the European working see Geary, *Identities*, pp. 27–32.

ten constituted ‘bargaining by riot’ in Eric Hobsbawm’s famous phrase. Collective slow-downs and strikes were not unknown in slave America as well as Europe, though these obviously required solidarity to make punishment difficult.<sup>46</sup> Such acts on the part of slaves were rarely knee-jerk reactions to misfortune but – again as in Europe – required a degree of prior communication and informal organization, as well as some idea of what was acceptable and what was not. That is, even in slave societies one can find some equivalent of a ‘moral economy’, in particular in the expectation of Sunday rest and the right to work on one’s own behalf for part of the week. (This was when slave miners in Minas Gerais found the richest seams of gold!).<sup>47</sup>

It is, of course, true that the most distinctive form of slave resistance – collective flight to or the formation of settlements of runaway slaves, known as *quilombos* or *mocambos* – had no real equivalent in Europe. This was partly for topographical reasons (the absence of jungles and swamps), partly as the European states possessed a greater weaponry of social control and partly because multiple forms of legal escape from a particular employer existed in Europe. The most feared and explosive form of collective protest, of course, was armed insurrection, which reached massive proportions in Europe in 1789, 1840 and 1848 and became increasingly frequent in the Americas from the 1770s. As in the case of European insurrections, slave rebellions required changing expectations of success, bred by ruptures in the social and political fabric. They were likely to take place when there were wars, invasions or internecine warfare between the white elites (as in the case of separatist or liberal revolts); they involved considerable planning; and they usually followed some infringement of conventions by owners or their agents. This suggests clear parallels between the study of slave rebellions and work on riotous artisans in Europe by generations of social historians such as E. P. Thompson, George Rudé and Charles Tilly, amongst others. Slave revolts were usually led by slaves of higher status and not by field-slaves – another aspect with clear European parallels; and usually they were carefully planned, as in the case of rebellions in Bahia in 1807, 1809 and 1814, involving attacks on towns, followed by retreats into the bush. They were often timed to coincide with religious holidays and festivals, as in 1816, and were rarely random in their violence.

46 On the Luddites see Maxine Berg: *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy*, Cambridge 1980; John G. Rule: *Moral Economy and Luddism*, in: Peter N Stearns (ed.): *Encyclopedia of European Social History*, New York 2000, pp. 205–216; Eric Hobsbawm: *The Machine-Breakers*, in: Eric Hobsbawm: *Labouring Men*, London 1964, pp. 5–17; Malcolm Thomis: *The Luddites*, Hamden 1970; Dick Geary: *European Labour Protest. 1848–1939*, London 1981, pp. 34–37; Edouard Dolléans: *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier. 1830–1871*, Paris 1936, p. 58; Patrick Kessel: *Le prolétariat avant Marx*, Paris 1968, pp. 197, 236 and 250; H. Henkel/R. Taubert: *Unterschichtenprotest in Deutschland. 1790–1870*, Göttingen 1988; R. Lison: *Gesellenboykott, Maschinensturm, Arbeitskampf, Frankfurt/Main 1984*; Michael Spehr: *Maschinensturm, Münster 2000*.

47 That protesting European crowds were structured, not random, and their activities informed by ideas of a ‘moral economy’, rather than being a knee-jerk reaction to misfortune, has been central to a massive literature. Of this see, for example, the seminal article of E. P. Thompson: *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd*, in: *Past and Present* 50 (1971), pp. 76–136. Also Richard Tilly: *Popular Disorders in 19th-century Germany*, in: *Journal of Social History* 1 (1970), pp. 25–30; George Rudé: *The Crowd in History*, New York 1964.

Slave rebellions tended not to involve wanton vandalism or pillage but targeted agents of the owners and the authorities, again replicating the behaviour of European crowds.<sup>48</sup>

However, there were also serious difference between slave revolts and artisan protest in Europe in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; for those protests that can be clearly categorized as *slave revolts* were deeply influenced by African culture, especially in the shape of religion and by African models of military action. For example, the armed rebellions in Bahia followed an increase in the importation of Yoruba, Hanas and Aja-Fon from Benin and Nigeria, who themselves had been the victims of armed conflicts in their homelands and had experience either of African militarism or of resistance to it. Furthermore, some of these slaves had been leaders of their communities in West Africa. In the course of their rebellion they found themselves confronted with the *mulattos*, *pardos*, *cabras* and *crioulos* (those of mixed race and Brazilian-born), who were more deeply influenced by European culture and who formed the bulk of the agencies of control and subjugation as police, slave hunters and regular army troops.<sup>49</sup>

This is not to say that Brazilian-born slaves never participated in forms of popular protest. *Negros de ganho* (artisans and street vendors) were sometimes urban rebels, as in the so-called 'Tailors' Revolt' of 1798 in Salvador and in the *Inconfidência Mineira* in Ouro Preto in the same year. Both of these movements were inspired by the discourse of the Enlightenment and the example of the French Revolution. Creole slaves often participated in riots, together with freedmen and poor whites in the towns, in separatist disturbances, independence revolts, republican agitation or attacks on Portuguese merchants, who controlled merchant capital. Such forms of popular protest can find clear analogies in European riots in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, directed against merchant capitalists, and suggest that European models relate more closely to these forms of protest on the part of Creole slaves (slaves born in the New World) than they do to slave rebellions, where the presence of Africa was much more marked.<sup>50</sup>

48 On slave revolts and their structure see footnote 15 above. On artisan involvement in riots and revolution see Rudé: *Crowd*; Charles, Louise and Richard Tilly: *The Rebellious Century*, London 1975; Christopher H. Johnson: *Economic Change and Artisan Discontent*, in: Roger Price (ed.): *Revolution and Reaction*, London 1975, p. 87ff; Charles Tilly/Lynn H Rees: *The People of June 1848*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 170–207; William H. Sewell: *Work and Revolution in France*, Cambridge 1980; John Breuilly: *Artisan Economy, Ideology and Politics*, in: John Breuilly: *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Manchester 1992; Michael Hanagan: *Nascent Proletarians*, Oxford 1989; Dick Geary: *European Labour*, pp. 24–89; George Rudé: *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford 1989; Albert Soboul: *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution*, Oxford 1964; H.-G. Husung: *Protest und Repression im Vormärz*, Göttingen 1986; John Breuilly: *The Revolutions of 1848*, in: David Parker (ed.): *Revolutions and the Revolutionary Tradition in the West*, London 2000; Jonathan Sperber: *The European Revolutions 1848–51*, Cambridge 1994; James R. Farr: *Artisans in Europe 1350–1914*, Cambridge 2000; Charles Tilly: *Popular Contention in Great Britain 1758–1834*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1995; John Stevenson: *Popular Disturbances in England 1700–1832*, London 1992; Mark Harrison: *Crowds and History*, Cambridge 1988; Michael P. Hanagan: *Urban Crowds*, in: Stearns (ed.), *Encyclopedia*, pp. 217–226.

49 See footnotes 28, 35, 36 and 37 above.

50 An excellent account of social movements in Brazil between 1800 and 1850, which included both slaves and others (poor whites, Indians), can be found in Marcus J. M. de Carvalho: *Liberdade*, Recife 2001.