"BEFORE THE POISON HAD BEEN FAR SPREAD": AN EXAMINATION OF PUNISHMENTS DEALT TO SLAVE REBELS IN TWO 18TH CENTURY BRITISH PLANTATION SOCIETIES

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"Upon the Execution of the first twelve, it might have been reasonably thought, that at least a present Stop might have been put to their prosecuting this Bloody Conspiracy; but the Conspirators Spirits seem'd rather to be raised than sunk by it."[139] This statement, recorded in the official report to the British government on the 1736 slave conspiracy in Antigua, demonstrates the seemingly surprised reaction of authorities towards the slaves' attitudes to gruesome executions of their comrades. These same words also indicate that the slaves interpreted the punishments in a different way than authorities intended.

By examining two major slave conspiracies to revolt in the British Empire during the early 18th century, patterns of punishment emerge and raise questions on the interpretations and purposes of punishment for slave revolts. This paper will examine the punishments for the slave uprisings of Antigua in 1736 and Stono, South Carolina in 1739. By using these occurrences as case studies, this paper will seek to explore possible answers to several questions. Why are the different patterns of punishment and their meanings in these two cases important to consider? How important are the different perspectives of punishments when gauging the level of the punishments' success in deterring future rebellion? The differing reactions to punishments indicate that the attitudes towards criminal punishments for revolts were anything but unified. Social standing, the perpetration of violence against whites, and cultural perceptions appeared to play a distinct role in how people viewed and reacted to the punishments in these cases. The two cases illustrate how authorities reacted to conspiracies and what they believed were necessary punishments. Furthermore, in both cases, the purpose of punishment reasserted social power in the white authorities' hands. The different patterns of punishment indicate that authorities had difficulty finding a punishment that worked effectively to deter slave rebellion. Finally, these

[139] "A full and particular ACCOUNT of the late horrid NEGRO PLOT in Antigua, as Reported by the Committee appointed by the Government there to enquire into the same," Pennsylvania Gazette, March 17, 1737.

two cases demonstrate that white authorities failed to calculate how slaves would react to the punishment, and this lack of cultural consideration for the slaves' African heritage aided in creating problems for colonial authorities in finding a successful punishment. As the passage above demonstrates, punishments did not deter but inspired slaves to continue with rebellious plans.[140]

Two Attempts at Revolt: Plans and Acts

Late in 1735, slaves in Antigua united and began to plan a revolt against the outnumbered white population of the island. Colonial records reporting to England after the planned revolt estimated that "there are at least 24,000 negroes in the island and not above 3000 whites."[141] The conspirators, led by a Coromantee slave known as Court or Tackey, planned to kill all the whites and set up an African led state. Court acquired the support of the island's creoles who found leadership in a slave named Tomboy.[142] By uniting the two groups, the slaves believed they would have a better chance of succeeding in the attack. The plan involved placing gunpowder under a mansion where the annual great ball of celebration in honor of the

[140] This paper seeks to fill a gap in the historiography on 18th century slave revolts in the British Empire by focusing on and comparing punishment patterns. The paper is not so concerned with the details of the revolts, but the aftermath during the punishment phase. In addition, most scholarly work on revolts focuses on one particular location, such as David Barry Gaspar's Bondmen & Rebels in Antigua, which weaves the 1736 revolt into a wider discussion of master-slave relations on the island. Peter Wood's Blacr Majority for South Carolina culminates his narrative on the slave population in the colony with the Stono Revolt and its aftermath. Vincent Brown's The Reaper's Garden looks at numerous revolts in Jamaica in his study of power and death in the colony. Because these all focus solely on one location, the comparative aspect of punishment needs to be explored further. My project, on a very small scale attempts to begin to fill this hole by looking across plantation societies in the British colonies to look at the complex punishment patterns and perceptions in order to try to make sense of why punishment was not standard even within one colonial system.

[141] C.O. 152, 40, fos. 288b and 288c. From 'America and West Indies: February 1737, 16-28', Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: 1737, volume 43 (1963) pp. 40-59. Accessed from British History Online, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=802. Gaspar notes that this was more than 88% of the island's population. David Barry Gaspar, "The Antigua Slave Conspiracy of 1736: A Case Study of the Origins of Collective Resistance," The William and Mary Quarterly 35, no. 2 (1987): 313.

[142] Michael Craton, Testing the Chains Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 120-121.

anniversary of George II's coronation on October 11, 1736 was to take place in hopes of blowing up the governor and other elite planters in attendance. Simultaneously with the explosion, rebels would take control of the harbor and slaves on plantations would commence total destruction of the plantations and the white population. The conspirators delayed the plan when the ball was rescheduled for October 30, 1736.[143] Due to the postponement, members of the white population heard rumors of the proposed revolt, and succeeded in stopping the slaves' conspiracy before violence occurred.

In considering the rebels, British authorities argued "that they had Hearts and Minds capable of conceiving, Heads fit for contriving, and Hands and Courage for executing the deepest and most bloody Crime, even that unparallel'd HELLISH PLOT formed by them, against his Majesty's Government of this island."[144] In the wake of the news of the revolt, an investigative committee, led by Robert Arbuthnot and three others was established on October 19.[145] The official report presented by Arbuthnot acknowledged these characteristics of the slaves and explained how the conspiracy was found out:

> the uncommon Liberty of Behaviour and Speech of some Slaves in and about the Town, an unusual Noise of Conck Shells blown in the Dead of Night without any apparent Cause; the Assembling of great Numbers of Slaves at unseasonable Times; [and] great Feastings and Caballings at one of which COURT was then reported to have been Crowned and Honoured as KING.[146]

The slaves' indiscrete behavior tipped authorities off to the illicit actions amongst slaves, which led to the initial demise of the plan. Colonial authorities took swift action against the leaders,

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[143] Craton, 121. Gaspar in his article "The Antigua Slave Conspiracy of 1736" notes that some historians think that the 1736 plot was a continuation of the aborted plot of 1728-29, (p. 315). This could also play a role in the fact that punishment did not have the same effect on slaves as the authorities expected if the desire for continued organized resistance prevailed in the island over several years.

[144] "A full and particular ACCOUNT," The Pennsylvania Gazette, March 17, 1737.

[145] David Barry Gaspar, Bondmen & Rebels A Study of Master Slave Relations in Antigua (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 21.

[146] "A full and particular ACCOUNT," The Pennsylvania Gazette, March 17, 1737.

who were "seizd and put to Death with Torments" within days.[147] Letters sent out of Antigua noted the slaves' "miserable deaths" for their association with the plot.[148] In a letter dated October 24, 1736, an anonymous man notes that on October 20, the executions began. He wrote, "King Court was brought to the Place of Execution, there was laid extended on a Wheel, seized by the Wrists and Ancles, and so laid basking in the Sun for the full Space of an Hour and a Quarter, or more, when he begged leave to plead.when he acknowledged every thing that was alledged against him."[149] At noon on the 20th, Court was killed, with Tomboy following the next day, and another conspirator named Hercules the next. The author details the executions, writing, "their Bones were broke, and after that their Heads cut off and stuck up in a Pole on some considerable Heighth; and four more of these honest Gentlemen were burnt the same Day in Otter's Pasture, and tomorrow will be seven more, and so many as they can find leading Men into this Plot."[150] As a final phase of punishment, authorities burnt the bodies of Court and Tomboy after their deaths.[151]

These gruesome spectacles of punishment, according to authorities, were meant to illustrate the swift and harsh hand of justice towards those who rebelled against the crown. The slow, torturous punishments demonstrated the authority of the white population on the island. Authorities made a spectacle of colonial power, illustrating to the slaves that they could not rebel or even plan to rebel without reaping the harsh penalties exacted on their comrades. Even though slaves failed to attack the white population in 1736, the show of torture and execution demonstrated that colonial authorities had no intention of relinquishing power to the slave

[147] "Philadelphia, Nov. 25," The Pennsylvania Gazette, November 25, 1736.
[148] "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Antigua to his Friend," The Pennsylvania Gazette, December 9, 1736.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Gaspar, Bondmen & Rebels, 22-23.

population. This logical purpose of punishment, however, did not appear to have such an effect on the slaves.

Plans to revolt continued to form amongst Antigua's slaves. The official investigation noted that "much remained to be done, and that our Danger was as great as ever."[152] Colonial officials realized that "the execution of the first twelve did not break the conspiracy, for at least 50 took the oath [for rebellion] on 26 October last after the executions. We may say with certainty that the particular inducement to the slaves to set this plot on foot, next to the hope of freedom, was the inequality of number of white and black."[153] Furthermore, it seems that the attitude of the condemned, facing their deaths with calm and resoluteness, "steeled the resolution of many other slaves" toward further rebellion.[154] The punishments of the rebels did not deter other potential conspirators. As suggested above, the population disparity between blacks and whites could have also played a role in the continuation of plotting. However, the planning and determination may also have continued because authorities made the conspiracy's leaders into martyrs for the freedom cause through their harsh treatment of Court and Tomboy. Due to the quick but torturous executions and subsequent secret trials and investigations to uncover further conspirators, the slaves may have felt justified in continuing the planning to revolt for their

[152] "A full and particular ACCOUNT," The Pennsylvania Gazette, March 17, 1737.
[153] C.O. 152, 22, fos. 302-303d, 306-307d, 311-323d. From 'America and West Indies: January 1737', Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: 1737, volume 43 (1963), pp. 1-21. From British History Online, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=72897.
[154] Craton, 121. White observers were also impressed by the zeal and calm of the slaves. One noted that Tomboy "died the bravest of any _ for he never winched, all the while his Bones were breaking and was more troubled at the Impertinence of a Fly which perched upon his Lip, than all the Torments he endured upon the Rack." Gaspar, Bondmen & Rebels, 23. Stoicism of slaves facing death appears to be a prevalent occurrence. In Jamaica's Tacky's Revolt in 1760, one man's execution by burning was viewed by a white man: "The wretch that was burnt was made to sit on the ground, and his body being chained to an iron stake, the fire was applied to his feet. He uttered not a groan, and saw his legs reduced to ashes with the utmost firmness and composure; after which one of his arms by some means getting loose, he snatched a brand from the fire that was consuming him, and flung it at the face of his executioner." Vincent Brown, The Reaper's Garden Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 148.

freedom and fulfill plans made by Court and Tomboy.[155] The persistence of the conspiracy, argues David Barry Gaspar, "attests to how successfully the leaders, and indeed the followers, played their roles in maintaining solidarity."[156] British authorities realized the persistence of the slaves when discussing the issue of torture for confessions, because in "inflicting torture on persons suspected of the plot, we three times made fruitless experiment thereof, and then declined further use."[157] Torture did not stop the planning and appears to be considered here a waste of time and energy since it did not produce desired results.

The punishments set forth by British authorities failed to deter as quickly as they had expected. In a sense, the persistence of the conspirators, which made the authorities realize the complexity and danger of the plot, created a frenzy of killing in order to try to quash the conspiracy and break the resolve of the slaves. After an initial round of executions, Governor William Mathew wrote to the Board of Trade and Plantations that "I hope they will in good time put an end to these executions; I think they are very numerous."[158] The disgust even on the official side of the executions is evident, an indication that maybe the punishments had lost their utility and were now superfluous as it became clear that the gruesome deaths did not deter the slaves. Ironically, even with these anxious sentiments stated above, authorities continued in their quest for vengeance. The judges determined that breaking on the wheel and burning at the stake were "too lenitive and not Sufficiently Exemplary because the Criminals were not long enough

[155] A short description of the trial procedures of the colonial authorities can be found in the 'America and West Indies: January 1737', Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: 1737, volume 43 (1963), pp. 1-21 and in the official report printed in the Pennsylvania Gazette on March 24, 1737. The report elaborates on the use of slaves as witnesses and why the trials were conducted in secret, mainly to avoid white planters' presence when their slaves were tried or on the stand as witnesses. The procedures used at the trials call into question the quality of justice the authorities sought or if they were more concerned with vengeance and making a point to the slave population.

[156] Gaspar, "The Antigua Slave Conspiracy of 1736," 317. Gaspar in Bondmen & Rebels notes that Secundi led the conspiracy after the initial round of executions "determined to revolt and avenge the deaths of Court and Tomboy" (p. 23).

[157] C.O. 152, 22, fos. 302-303d, 306-307d, 311-323d. From 'America and West Indies: January 1737.'

[158] Ibid.

under their Suffering."[159] They turned to the use of the gibbet to extend their suffering and invoke "greater Terror into the Slaves that may see their Suffering."[160] Like the executions on the wheel, the dead from the gibbets were decapitated and burnt. It is interesting that authorities believed they needed to find a more edifying means to punish the conspirators, thus turning to the gibbet. This action indicates that the slaves had not responded to the earlier executions in the way intended, thus forcing colonial officials to find another way to try to stop the conspiracy.

In sum, a colonial report from Antigua in May, 1737 recorded that eighty-eight slaves had been executed, five broken on the wheel, six gibbeted alive, and seventy-seven burnt alive at the stake. Furthermore, thirty-six had been transported as punishment.[161] The high numbers indicate the desperate nature of the authorities to quell the fear of the white population and to inflict terror on the slaves towards rebelling against colonial authority. The slaves' differing perceptions of punishment, however, seemed to force the investigation to continue, as is evident in their continued planning for rebellion to avenge the deaths of their martyred friends.

Gruesome punishments of slave revolts in the British Empire were not limited to islands of the West Indies. Only a few years after the executions in Antigua, punishments of the Stono Revolt in South Carolina echoed those of Antigua. Sources are quite limited on the Stono Rebellion, but those compiled by historian Mark Smith provide insight into the punishments for the rebels. On September 9, 1739, a Sunday, a group of about twenty "Angolan" slaves "seized a store of firearms and marched off on a trail of destruction and killing, with two drums and banners flying" attracting other slaves and reaching numbers around ninety.[162] In the initial part

[159] Gaspar, Bondmen & Rebels, 24.
[160] Ibid.
[161] C.O. 152, 23, fos. 20-34d. From 'America and West Indies: May 1737, 16-31', Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: 1737, volume 43 (1963), pp. 155-173. From British History Online , http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=72907.
[162] John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," American Historical Review 96 (October 1991): 1102.

of the rebellion, the slaves "massacred twenty-three Whites after the most cruel and barbarous Manner to be conceived."[163] From one slave account to a British Ranger in the employ of Gen. James Oglethorpe, one learns that the slaves "Murthered two Storekeepers Cut their Heads off and Set them on the Stairs Robbed the stores of what they wanted and went on killing what Men, Women, and Children they met, Burning of Houses and Committing other Outrages."[164] The slaves battled with a South Carolina militia force, and some continued their quest for freedom by heading towards St. Augustine, Florida. Skirmishes between slaves and militia carried on for several days.[165]

In response to these crimes, some slaves, considered "Villains," "attempted to go home but were taken by the Planters who Cutt off their heads and set them up at every Mile Post they came to."[166] The slaves were shot to death before decapitation.[167] One account noted that "they did not torture one Negroe, but only put them to an easy death."[168] It is in these sources that one learns of the type of punishment executed on these slaves at Stono and sees connections to what took place in Antigua, namely the act of decapitation. In addition, it is interesting to note that the same act of violence the slaves used towards the storekeepers was later used as punishment for themselves. Historian Edward Pearson contends that the beheading of whites denoted the upsetting of the power order in South Carolina. Because decapitation was a common punishment for slave criminals in South Carolina, the slaves "appropriated this form of

[163] "Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Causes of the Disappointment of Success in the Late Expedition against St. Augustine," Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, ed. J. H. Easterby et al. (Columbia: Historical Commission of South Carolina, 1953), July 1, 1741, pp. 83-84. In Mark M. Smith, ed., STONO Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 28.
[164] "A Ranger's Report of Travels with General Oglethorpe, 1739-1742," in Travels in the American Colonies, ed. Newton D. Mereness (New York: Macmillan, 1916), pp. 222-23. In Smith, 7.
[165] Thornton, 1103.
[166] "A Ranger's Report," in Smith, 8.
[167] "An Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina," in The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia, ed. Allen D. Candler, Wm. L. Northern, and Lucian L. Knight (Atlanta: Byrd, 1913), vol. 22, pt. 2, pp. 232-236. In Smith, 15.
[168] Ibid.

punishment for themselves, the rebels inverted patterns of discipline used by authorities for their own purposes."[169] Thus, the decapitation of slaves after Stono's violence was not out of the ordinary, and the act was charged with meanings of power.

These initial punishments did not include all the rebels, as many escaped detection and continued roaming the area. One account of the revolt noted that "the Humanity afterwards [regarding the lack of torture] hath had so good an Effect that there hath been no farther Attempt, and the very Spirit of Revolt seems over."[170] This comment seems ironic in light of the fact that a few lines later, the same report recorded that "30 escaped from the fight, of which ten marched about 30 miles Southward, and being overtaken by the Planters on horseback, fought stoutly for some time and were all killed on the Spot. The rest are yet untaken."[171] Because some rebels were still at large, it does not seem right to think that the 'Spirit of Revolt' was over. In a September 28, 1739 diary entry, it was noted that "the Negroes or Moorish slaves are not yet pacified but are roaming around in Gangs in the Carolina forests."[172] Historian Peter Wood argues that the rebels' "presence in the countryside provided an invitation to wider rebellion."[173]

So what does one make of the punishments when learning that there was still a fear of revolt days after the attack? The situation could be similar to Antigua, where the deaths of some rebels spurred on the idea for further revolt. Another similarity between the two cases is the fact that the black population outnumbered the white population. By the early 18th century, by 1720,

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[169] Edward A. Pearson, "'A Countryside Full of Flames': A Reconsideration of the Stono Rebellion and Slave Rebelliousness in the Early Eighteenth-Century South Carolina Lowcountry," in STONO Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt ed. Mark M. Smith (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2005), 97. As will be discussed later in this paper, the commonality of decapitation in some African tribes may have also added to the slaves' use and reaction to this type of punishment.

[170] "An Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina" in Smith, 15.

[171] Ibid.

[172] Diary Entry, Friday, September 28, 1739. In Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America. Edited by Samuel Urlsperger, vol. 6, 1739, trans. And ed. George Fenwick Jones and Renate Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), p. 226. In Smith, 11.

[173] Peter H. Wood, Blacr Majority Negroes in Colonial South Carolina From 6J70 through the Stono Rebellion (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 318.

blacks accounted for 12,000 of the 21,000 total population, thus possibly making revolt seem easier to accomplish.[174] In another perspective, the heinous decapitation punishments of the slaves may have scared rebels from going back to work, which in turn made whites fearful of future rebellion. This idea raises the question of whether the decapitations worked to deter revolt or if it just perpetuated fear among both slaves and whites. The reason why the authorities in Stono dealt such quick punishments to the rebels needs to be considered. Unlike the events in Antigua, at Stono, slaves brutally attacked the white population. It seems that the white authorities' knee-jerk reaction to the rebellion by the quick executions and decapitations had something to do with the immediate need to reassert the social hierarchy. White society had been attacked, and the swift, violent retribution dealt to the slaves demonstrates the urgency of the situation at Stono to reestablish order.

The colonists' continued fear of revolt belied their assertion of power over the slave population. British officials also planned to "encourage some Indians by a suitable Reward to pursue and if possible to bring back the Deserters, and while the Indians are thus Employed they would be in the way ready to intercept others that might attempt to follow."[175] In addition, throughout the fall of 1739, farmers and other white citizens feared further insurrection and left their farms for places that could be protected more easily; and towns kept guards for protection.[176] Some rebel slaves "remained at large for several years. One alleged leader,

[174] Darold D. Wax, "'The Great Risque We Run': The Aftermath of Slave Rebellion at Stono, South Carolina, 1739-1745," The Journal of Negro History 67 no. 2 (1982): 136. In Wood, Blacr Majority, he estimates that by 1740 the slave population was around 39,000, with 20,000 slaves being directly imported from Africa in the preceding decade (p. 302). This, coupled with Wood's argument that there is little evidence that death was higher amongst newcomers, illustrates how highly African the slave population was in South Carolina, not to mention the disproportion of blacks and whites.

[175] Lt. Gov. Sir William Bull to the Board of Trade, Charleston, October 5, 1739 (Received December 10, 1739), Sainsbury Transcripts, Records in the British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina, 1711-1782, vol. 20, pp. 179-80, in the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia S.C. (C.O. Papers, S.C. Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, 1730-1746, no. 5/388). In Smith, 17.

[176] Wax, 138.

discovered late in December, 1742, in a swamp, was brought to Stono and 'immediately hang'd.'"[177] The perpetual fear of whites towards what had happened at Stono illustrates their obsession with rooting out all conspirators and their extreme desire to punish all involved to deter future rebellion and reassert the social order. Furthermore, the continued man-hunts for conspirators indicate that the slaves who were at-large were not scared of the consequences of their actions, as their desire for freedom was higher than the punishment that awaited them.

African Perceptions of Punishments and Death

While the perceptions of punishment from the British colonial perspective are easier to understand, unpacking the beliefs towards punishment and death of the slaves proves to be difficult. The ethnicities of those slaves involved in the revolt may shed light on particular beliefs that the slaves brought to revolts and punishments. In both cases, the high African population in the colonies where the revolts took place may have added to why the white authorities punished the way they did and why it appears that the slaves did not react to the punishments in the way colonial officials may have expected.

Antiguan slave owners preferred slaves from the Gold Coast of West Africa, including Coromantees and slaves from Dahomey. The Coromantees were not a specific ethnic group, rather just a name given to slaves from the region.[178] Most likely, many of these slaves originated from the Akan language group, due to their prevalence in the Gold Coast region.

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[177] Ibid. 138-9.

[178] Gaspar, Bondmen & Rebels, 89. David Eltis' The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade Database at http://www.slavevoyages.net/tast/index.faces notes that from 1726-1736 focusing on Antigua as the principal place of landing, out of 71 voyages recorded in the database, 10 were identified as coming from the Gold Coast. Also of interest are the 6 voyages from the Bight of Benin. These numbers of voyages are not as high as I expected, but they still constitute a solid percentage of the slave ships coming to Antigua. From those 16 voyages, 4,339 slaves disembarked in Antigua during this decade. This number alone is higher than the estimated 3000 white inhabitants of the island at the time of the conspiracy. This high African population, then added to the island's creole slave population helps one to understand why the population proportion was so skewed.

These slaves had "firmness both of body and mind; a ferociousness of disposition; but withal, activity, courage and stubborness."[179] Because of this disposition, slave owners viewed Coromantees as having the characteristics to "meet death, in its most horrible shape, with fortitude or indifference."[180] These observations, while from the British perspective, note the physical and mental strength of the group and suggest how they reacted to death. The issue of fortitude is apparent in the fact that slaves continued to conspire even after their leaders were killed. In addition, accounts of Court and Tomboy's calmness toward death illustrates these qualities of fortitude and indifference.

Gaspar also notes that Antiguans also favored slaves from Dahomey because they were "unquestionably the most docile and best-disposed Slaves that are imported from any part of Africa."[181] While these slaves were not recognized as conspirators by their ethnicities, the fact that these people were prevalent in Antigua may have allowed some of their native beliefs on death and punishment to filter through the whole of Antigua's slave population.

The alleged ethnicity of the rebels of Stono is Kongolese. Several sources of the time note the ethnicity to be Angolan. In the "Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina," the unknown author writes that "amongst the Negroe Slaves there are a people brought from the Kingdom of Angola in Africa, many of these speak Portugueze."[182] Historian John Thornton disagrees and notes that the likelihood is that they hailed from the Kongo, not Portuguese Angola. Not only does the rebels' Catholic faith confirm this, but so does the fact that the British Royal Africa Company dealt in slaves from Kongo whereas the Portuguese in Angola would

[179] Gaspar, Bondmen& Rebels, 90.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] "An Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina," Smith, 14.

have more likely sold slaves to their own colonies.[183] In either case, the fact that rice planting was popular in the Kongo-Angola region may have influenced how so many slaves of this African heritage came to be in South Carolina.[184] It is important to note that in both groups of African slaves in these rebellions, those from the Gold Coast and those from Kongo-Angola, war and subsequently the military knowledge of organizing attacks and using weapons were common and can also help us to understand why these groups could contemplate or enact such heinous plans.[185]

Turning to African specific views of death and punishment, some interesting ideas emerge that help one begin to understand reasons for why the slaves reacted to the punishments in Antigua and South Carolina the way they did. Considering specific types of execution styles and looking into African beliefs towards them and the idea of death demonstrate how the slaves' African heritage helped to shape their views of punishment and how their beliefs may have thwarted the British purpose of punishment.

For slaves who rebelled, their bodies were "denied formal burial, were dismembered and left to rot in public places. Decapitation was almost a rule; the severed heads were displayed on poles on the rebels' home plantations."[186] While this tactic was supposed to inflict terror towards the belief that "such dismemberment deprived them of the longed-for chance of a return in the

[183] Thornton, 1103-1105. Again using the Eltis Database, one can find that during the decade of 1729-1739, out of 97 voyages that landed in South Carolina, 39 came from the West Central Africa & St. Helena region, where Kongo Angola is located. 10,962 slaves disembarked from these 39 voyages, which corroborates again the high black slave population of South Carolina noted near the time of the Stono Rebellion.
[184] Wood, Blacr Majority 59.
[185] Robin Law, The Slave Coast of West Africa, 550 J750 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 269-270. This militaristic opinion seems to call into question the docility of Dahomian slaves according to Gaspar. As will be explored further in this paper, Dahomian culture was immersed in violence and death. Georges Balandier argues "The Kongo was born of violence; down through successive reigns power had always been taken by force; force had remained a fundamental value." The value of force and war in the Kongo helps to elucidate why the slaves in South Carolina might have been able to rebel with such aggression. Georges Balandier, Daily Life in the ingdom of the ongo (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1968), 118.
[186] Craton, 100.

spirit world to the Africa heartland," did slaves see it that way?[187] The planters may not have been aware that beheading "duplicated the practice of Akan and other African warriors who made much of the display of the heads of defeated enemies."[188] Vincent Brown argues that "there is little or no direct evidence that Africans believed that losing their head or a limb would prevent their return to ancestral lands" as many African cultures used decapitation in ritual ceremonies. Furthermore, he contends that "according to Africans' prevailing beliefs, the spirits of executed rebels, at least those who were born in Africa, probably returned to Africa."[189]
Continuing with the idea of returning to Africa, a 1792 poem written by a British military officer in Jamaica provides insight into one perspective of the slaves toward death. John Majoribanks wrote that slaves were "Resolv'd to perish by a heroe's hand, He seeks in suicide his native land."[190] The footnote for this verse notes that "This is more particularly the case with the high spirited Coromantees. I never conversed with any African negro, who did not seem to consider death as a certain passport to Guinea."[191] While this poem was written decades after the Antiguan conspiracy, the idea posed that Coromantees saw death as a way back home may help explain how Antiguan Coromantees in 1736 reacted to the executions. Death was a way out of slavery, a way home, illustrating that they did not seem to fear death.

Examining human sacrifice rituals in pre-colonial West Africa also help glean information about African views of death. Historian Robin Law writes that "many of the people sacrificed in West Africa were criminals, who had been sentenced to death but preserved to be killed at the major religious festivals" and ceremonies to honor dead kings, especially in Benin

[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Brown, 134, 152.
[190] John Majoribanks, Slavery An Essay in Verse, (Edinburgh: J. Robertson, no. 39, South Bridge Street, 1792), 23.
[191] Ibid.

and Dahomey where Antiguan slaves may have called home.[192] Those sacrificed were seen as the "servile class" in the afterlife, being messengers to gods and deceased kings.[193] It seems plausible that those executed in Antigua or even spectators to the deaths may have believed that those condemned would have an important purpose after life.[194] While the British did not see the executed in Antigua as sacrifices, the African beliefs that human sacrificial victims had important roles to play after life seems to diminish the importance of creating terror towards death that colonial officials hoped to use to stop the conspiracy.

Decapitation held a significant role in the West African Dahomian culture and could have been translated into beliefs in Antigua.[195] In Dahomey, war captives and criminals were decapitated to honor kings.[196] The heads "were regularly preserved for ritual and ceremonial display" or sometimes were used in "a sort of monumental architecture" in thrones or floors "paved with skulls."[197] While these displays of skulls indicate Dahomian power and might towards enemies, the commonality of the use of skulls and decapitation in Dahomey may have translated to beliefs in Antigua. If the slaves interpreted the decapitation of their comrades' heads as a sign of British power and might, the slaves may have been inspired to commit further rebellion. In addition, seeing the heads may not have had the gruesome, terrifying impact on the

[192] Robin Law, "Human Sacrifice in Pre-Colonial West Africa," African Affairs 84, no. 334 (1985): 59.
[193] Ibid. 60.
[194] In addition to the idea of serving kings or deities in the afterlife, the belief in reincarnation appeared to be prevalent in the regions where the slaves of Antigua and South Carolina originated in Africa. There was a common belief of transmigration of souls moving to a new body either in animal or human form after death in Kongo and West Africa. This belief helps to explain why death might not have been so frightening for the rebels or those witnessing the executions because of this belief that one might be reborn into another being. See Theodore Besterman, "The Belief in Rebirth among the Natives of Africa (Including Madagascar)," Folrlore 41, no. 1 (1930): 43-94. Information on West and Central Africa found on pages 71-94.
[195] Robin Law, "'My Head Belongs to the King': On the Political and Ritual Significance of Decapitation in Pre-Colonial Dahomey," The Journal of African History 30, no. 3 (1989): 405. He notes that "It should be emphasized that this custom of the decapitation of enemies and the preservation of their heads for ceremonial display was not peculiar to the Dahomians, or even original to them, since similar practices are attested earlier, in other states of the region prior to the Dahomian conquest of the 1720s."
[196] Law, "My Head," 401.
[197] Ibid. 402, 403.

Antiguan slaves simply because it was a common sight in Africa. Interestingly, it was thought that for a defeated enemy of the Dahomians, being chosen as a slave was a worse fate than being decapitated.[198] This perspective may also help to explain why the slaves did not react as poorly to decapitation, as it may have been seen as a freeing act, one that removed them from the degradation of slavery.

Exploring the role of decapitation in burial practices in African traditions also provides useful information when considering slave reactions to punishment. The 17th century Dahomian King Wegbaja tried to reform burial practices and to "suppress the decapitation of the corpses, and the misappropriation of the severed heads for ritual or ceremonial display" particularly of enemies of the deceased to steal the heads.[199] Another act at issue, according to Law, was the tradition of Dahomians exhuming a deceased body after three months and removing the head from the corpse to venerate it and the deceased's soul through ritual sacrifices and processions.[200] With these traditions in mind, it seems plausible that the heads separated from the bodies of the executed in Antigua may not have terrorized the onlookers, but may have played on beliefs of veneration and honor of the dead that was common in Africa.

Decapitation was not only prominent in Dahomey. In the Kongo, the role of power is important when examining decapitation. Wyatt MacGaffey argues that for sacrifice in the Kongo, "the victims did not have to be criminals _ .It is probably irrelevant to try to distinguish between 'criminal' and non-criminal victims; both established the chief's power."[201] When considering the actions at Stono, first the decapitation of the storeowners and later the decapitation of the slave rebels, the shifting roles of power and ideas of what decapitation meant

[198] Ibid. 406.
[199] Ibid. 411.
[200] Ibid. 412.
[201] Wyatt MacGaffey, ongo Political Culture The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 138.

become clear. Rebels at Stono, if decapitation was considered to give such power to chiefs in Africa, could have seen themselves as taking power away from the white population. In return, when the white authorities decapitated slaves and put their heads on pikes, the white population reclaimed the power for themselves, showing finally who was going to hold power in South Carolina.

The appearance of fire in the slave punishments presents some problems when trying to uncover how the Africans viewed fire. One nineteenth century source noted that the Asante (also Ashante or Ashantee) of the Gold Coast (an Akan ethnic group that could have been the heritage of some Antiguan Coromantees) used "immolation of prisoners taken in war" as "one of their revolting practices."[202] This practice relates to the common practice of decapitation and human sacrifice practiced in the region as part of war and religious ceremonies. Slaves in Antigua may not have viewed burning as problematic as this was an action taken towards prisoners in Africa. In addition, like decapitation, burning may have been viewed as a sacrificial act as opposed to a vulgar punishment.

Another perspective on fire provides a different interpretation. Those from the Kongo, the alleged ethnicity of those rebels from Stono, "believed that it was the powers in the other world that caused all the good and evil perceived in this world and that all power and authority in this world derived from the other."[203] One category of these otherworldly spirits were the earth spirits or mbumba. Mbumba related to fertility and health issues and involved "a giant snake, water, trees, fire and fertility rites."[204] Because mbumba could be manifested in various ways, believers made offerings to the mbumba spirits "whenever they approached water, crossed a ford

[202] John Beecham, Ashantee and The Gold Coast Being a Sretch of the History, Social State, and Superstitions of the Inhabitants of Those Countries (London: John Mason, 1841), 223.
[203] Anne Hilton, The ingdom of ongo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 9.
[204] Ibid. 13.

with a strong current, fished, travelled along paths, stumbled unexpectedly on odd stones and pieces of wood, gave a gift of palm wine, or witnessed a crackling fire" to ensure good health and fertility.[205]

Furthermore, in the Kongo, the ritome priestly chiefdoms were related "to the mbumba dimension and to smithing," and the word kitome "meant the pure, the initiated, in contrast to the profane."[206] What is interesting about these particular beliefs on fire is that they have positive connotations, namely health and fertility. The fact that kitome means pure and is associated with smithing represents a non-threatening connotation of fire. While these beliefs belong to the Kongo people and not necessarily to those slaves from the Gold Coast like the Coromantees of Antigua, it is possible that the Coromantees held similar beliefs towards fire. It is possible that the slaves viewed the fires of punishment as manifestations of powers from the other world as opposed to something created by the British. If this is the case, slaves may not have felt the terror for which British authorities aimed, but rather as signs from another realm that they needed to accept.

Compared Punishment Patterns and Levels of Success

Looking at the two revolts in comparison of their punishment patterns, several things become clear. In Antigua, punishments for the conspiracy occurred before any violence against whites took place, whereas at Stono, punishments were enacted after the slaves had risen, murdered several white citizens and burnt down property. Looking at these cases more in depth raises some interesting issues regarding punishment patterns. Because the conspiracy was discovered in Antigua before the slaves had any chance to act, the authorities employed torture

[205] Ibid. 13-14.
[206] Ibid. 23.

and harsh punishments on the slaves believed to have been involved. In Stono, slave rebels experienced quick, less torturous deaths.

So why might this have been the case? In a sense, it seems counterintuitive for those white authorities involved at Stono to be relatively humane in their executions, especially after the white population had been violently attacked. Considering the punishments used in these two cases, some possible explanations arise. In Antigua, because authorities believed they had quashed the uprising, they had more time at hand to conduct a more thorough investigation with secret trials. Having gathered the information they needed, authorities could make a long, drawn out spectacle of the punishments with torture as a warning to slaves who might be contemplating a later revolt. By enacting such gruesome tortures and executions, the white authorities in Antigua reinforced their high status in the social hierarchy. Although slave violence had not overthrown their standing because authorities rooted out the conspiracy, white colonists still needed to make a lesson of these potential rebels and demonstrate their continuing dominance over the slaves of the island. In order to prove their status, the hideous tortures used demonstrated the authorities' wrath and potential violence against anyone who threatened their safety and social order.

The situation of the Stono Rebellion was quite different. As mentioned above, the authorities used relatively humane forms of execution of their slaves, but continued the practice of decapitation as a warning to others not to rebel. Why did they not conduct an investigation or round up the rebels and put them to agonizing deaths like those in Antigua? This question is especially interesting because the slaves had already killed numerous white colonists. One would think the white population of South Carolina would want the rebellious slaves to suffer for their deeds. Instead, they were shot quickly and decapitated. The authorities' actions at Stono

seem to be understood as retaliatory and out of a desperate sense of fear for their safety. The slaves at Stono had overturned the social order by actually pulling off a revolt and killing several whites. In reaction, the white population needed to prove their superiority and might by ending the rebellion quickly. There was no time to conduct a thorough investigation such as in Antigua. White authorities needed to reassert their standing in the social order through quick and violent suppression and did not need torture to do so.

The lack of torture at Stono is intriguing. It seems that the incessant fear of the white population in South Carolina immediately following the uprising may have led to the decision to simply root out whoever was thought to be involved and kill them immediately before ideas of further rebellion could spread. In Antigua, plans for further conspiracy continued even during the executions as slaves appeared to be spurred on by their comrades' deaths. In addition, authorities in Antigua realized they were not succeeding in stopping the conspiracy and turned towards more torturous executions by the gibbet to lengthen pain and hopefully be more successful at deterring future rebellion. In South Carolina, it may have been believed that it was better to stop the potential rebellion by executing quickly without a public spectacle in order to avoid slaves developing other plans of uprising. It is also possible that by not using torture, the white population tried to avoid giving slaves more reasons to rebel, by showing their relative 'humanity' towards the rebels. Authorities clearly wanted the rebellion to stop, and their continued manhunts for the runaway rebels illustrated this fact as fear continued to haunt South Carolina inhabitants for years after 1739.

In both slave uprisings, the punishments used by the colonial authorities failed to take into consideration the African beliefs of what punishments meant. The use of decapitation and fire failed to deter as much as authorities believed they would because African beliefs the slaves

might have held meant different things that ultimately thwarted the purpose of punishment for the colonial authorities. Such violent punishments make martyrs of the victims and create inspiration amongst slaves to incite or perpetuate the fear of further rebellion. In addition, many of the elements of punishment towards slave conspirators related to religious, legal, and royal ceremonies in Africa, which removed from the punishments the element of terror that the colonial authorities needed to create in order for the punishments to work as they intended. The slaves seemed to face punishments as either otherworldly signs, a chance to return to Africa, a chance to be free from slavery, or possibly as an opportunity to serve African kings in the afterlife. In any case, the cultural differences between the slaves and the white colonial authorities caused there to be differing views of the penalties for rebellion, ultimately causing the punishments to fail to stop further rebellion in these two places and others as well.

The struggles between rebellion and finding effective punishments to stop them continued to be problematic in other slave regions in the Atlantic world throughout the 18th century and up until abolition. In 1741, in New York City, approximately thirty slaves were killed by burning or hanging for a conspiracy to burn the city.[207] While authorities attributed suspicious fires in New York to the work of slaves, there was no violence against whites and like in Antigua, the drawn out trials of slaves and torturous executions parallel the heavy-handed reinforcement of white authority over the social structure. The 1760 uprising in Jamaica, known as Tacky's Revolt where numerous white overseers were murdered and several plantations burnt by slaves, utilized punishments for slaves where they were "first hanged, then their Heads struck

[207] Daniel Horsmanden, "A List of Negroes committed on Account of the Conspiracy," A Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy Formed by Some White People, in Conjunction with Negro and Other Slaves, for Burning the City of New Yorr in America, and Murdering the Inhabitants (New York: James Parker, 1744), 225- 228.

off, and fixed on Poles, and their bodies burnt."[208] Echoes from both Antigua and Stono are evident in these punishments, decapitation most notably, but the quick deaths by hanging reminisce of Stono's quick shootings after whites had already been attacked. While the conspiracies and revolts of Antigua and Stono were clearly not unique to the 18th century, they provide interesting and informative case studies in the patterns of punishment enacted on slaves for revolting and demonstrate clearly the problem of cultural meanings when it comes to interpreting the purpose of punishments. The African slaves and the white colonial authorities' differing interpretations of punishments added one more layer of tension between the two populations that pitted them against each other in a perpetual struggle for power, social order, and freedom for centuries.

[208] Brown, 153.

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