

## Time and Revolution in African America

### Temporality and the History of Atlantic Slavery

Walter Johnson

Let me begin with a famous misunderstanding. As he later recounted it, when Olaudah Equiano first saw the white slave traders who eventually carried him to the West Indies, he thought they were "bad spirits" who were going to eat him. Awaiting shipment across an ocean he had never heard of, Equiano, like many of the slaves carried away by the traders, made sense of an absurd situation with a narrative of supernatural power.<sup>1</sup> When he sat down to write his narrative, of course, Equiano knew better than to believe that the white men on the coast were "spirits." By that time he called himself Gustavus Vassa, and, having spent ten years in as a slave in the Americas and another twenty-three as a free man traveling throughout the world, Vassa could see what Equiano could not: that he was a descendent of the Lost Tribes of Israel, that his deliverance from heathenism marked him as a "*particular favorite of heaven*," and that the events in his life were effects not of the evil intentions of African spirits but of the Christian God's "Providence."<sup>2</sup> Vassa resolved the collision of contending versions of cause and consequence in his own mind through a narrative of progressive enlightenment: he had learned that it had been God's Providence to steal him away from Africa and carry him to London where he could spread the gospel of antislavery.

Vassa's time travel reminds us that global historical processes are un-

My thanks to Mia Bay, Thomas Bender, Chris Brown, Elizabeth Esch, Ada Ferrer, Michael Gomez, Robin D. G. Kelley, Maria Grazia Lolla, Molly Nolan, Ulfrid Reichardt, Jeffrey T. Sammons, Nikhil Pal Singh, Stephanie Smallwood, Sinclair Thomson, Henry Yu, and participants in the 1997 and 1998 NYU/OAH conferences on Internationalizing American History, the New Perspectives on the Slave Trade Conference at Rutgers University (November 21-22, 1997), and the Early American Seminar at Columbia University.

derstood through locally and historically specific narratives of time and history. And yet by invoking God's Providence, Vassa did not so much resolve the contention of these temporal narratives as superimpose one upon the other. Equiano's initial understanding of the situation of the coast was incorporated into the story of Vassa's eventual enlightenment. His African history was reframed according to the conventions of his European one.

Recent work in the humanities and social sciences has emphasized the darker side of the temporal conventions that have framed many Western histories of the rest of the world: their role in underwriting global and racial hierarchy. Concepts like primitiveness, backwardness, and underdevelopment rank areas and people of the world on a seemingly naturalized timeline—their "present" is our "past"—and reframe the grubby real-time politics of colonial domination and exploitation as part of an orderly natural process of evolution toward modernity. More than a fixed standard of measure by which the progress of other processes can be measured, time figures in these works as, in the words of Johannes Fabian, a culturally constructed "dimension of power."<sup>3</sup>

Seen in this light, Equiano's anachronistic account of the situation on the West Coast of Africa raises a host of questions about the history of Atlantic slavery: What were the historical and temporal narratives through which Africans and Europeans understood what was happening on the coast, in the slave ships, and in the slave markets of the Americas? How did these various understandings shape the historical process in which they were joined? In what cultural institutions were these ideas of time rooted, and through what practices were they sustained? What was the fate of African time in the Americas? What were the practical processes of temporal domination and resistance?

Taking time seriously suggests, at the very least, that the slave trade was not the same thing for Olaudah Equiano as it was for his captors. Most simply, this difference might be thought of spatially: "the slave trade" did not begin or end in the same place for European traders, American buyers, and African slaves. The African slave trade, after all, had an eastern branch stretching to Asia as well as a western one stretching to the Americas. Thus a historical account of the African experience of "the slave trade" necessarily has a different shape from an account of the European experience; indeed, properly speaking, "the slave trade" has not yet ended in some parts of Africa.<sup>4</sup> But even if we confine ourselves to the history of the Atlantic slave trade, the problem of boundaries persists. The journeys of the slaves who were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean often began in the interior of Africa, hundreds of miles from the coast where they eventually met the European slave traders, hundreds of miles away from where any European had ever been. Indeed, the First Passage was integral to the experience of those who eventually made the Middle Passage—to their understanding of

what it was that was happening, their emotional condition going into the journey, and their ability to survive it.<sup>5</sup> And yet the First Passage is often elided from historians' accounts of "the slave trade," many of which focus solely on the Middle Passage, treating the trade as if it were something that began on the West Coast of Africa with sale to a European trader and ended in a port in the Americas with sale to a colonial slaveholder. In so doing, they have unwittingly embedded the historical perspective of a European slave trader—for it was only for the traders, not for the slaves or the buyers, that "the slave trade" happened only in the space between the coasts—in the way they have bounded their topics.<sup>6</sup>

The historical disjuncture marked by Equiano's version of the situation on the coast, however, was much deeper than a difference about beginnings and endings. It signals a fundamental difference between the versions of slavery that met in the Atlantic trade. To oversimplify: in Euro-America, slavery was, above all, a system of economic exploitation; in much of West Africa, slavery was, above all, a system of political domination. In the Americas, slaves were purchased in markets, held as legally alienable property, and put to work as laborers producing staple crops and some other goods, which were generally shipped to Europe in exchange for money and more goods.<sup>7</sup> In much of precolonial West Africa, slavery began with capture: a warrior who would otherwise have been killed was allowed to live on a socially dead slave. Although most slaves in West Africa were agricultural laborers, many were employed as soldiers, state ministers, and diplomats, and even as governing placeholders for princes and kings. Some slaves owned slaves.<sup>8</sup> As such, West African slavery has often been described as a system of "institutionalized marginality," one among a set of intertwined social relations—kinship, fealty, clientage, and so on—by which one group of people held "wealth in people" in another. Some slaves, over time and generations, through marriage and connection, were able to move out of slavery and into another status.<sup>9</sup>

Equiano's confusion on the coast reminds us that two versions of slavery—"aristocratic slavery" and "merchant slavery" in Claude Meillassoux's formulation—met in the African trade. Those who entered the slave trade had been extracted from histories of enslavement and slavery that sometimes had very little to do with the Atlantic slave trade in the first instance. Rather, their story, as they understood it, was embedded in personal histories of isolation from protective kinship and patronage networks, in local histories of slave-producing ethnic conflicts, in political struggles, and wars that occurred hundreds of miles from the coast.<sup>10</sup>

This is not, however, to say that all African slavery was aristocratic slavery. The jagged boundary between aristocratic and merchant slavery, after all, often lay in the interior of the African continent—hundreds of miles beyond where any European had ever been. Many of the slaves who were

eventually shipped across the Atlantic had been captured, transported to the coast, and sold by people who were themselves Africans. The frontier between the two types of slavery was patrolled by an African supervisory elite who presumably knew the difference between them and made their living by transmuting the one into the other. And just as the protocols of merchant slavery stretched well into the interior of Africa, those of aristocratic slavery could stretch well into the journey across the Atlantic. To describe the people they transported to the Americas, the ship captains and clerks of the French West India Company used the word *capitif* rather than the more familiar *esclave*, a designation that apparently referred to the aristocratic slavery origins of those in the trade rather than their merchant slavery destinations.<sup>11</sup>

Corresponding to the different versions of slavery that met in the Atlantic trade were different ways of measuring the extent of slavery and marking its progress through time. The (aristocratic) slaveholding kings of precolonial Dahomey, for instance, represented their history as a story of continuous growth through military expansion and enslavement. Their history was measured in a yearly census—taken, historian Robin Law argues, as a means of "political propaganda . . . advertising the kingdom's successful growth"—and in mythical bags of pebbles kept in the castle that tracked the kingdom's expansion—one pebble per person—over time.<sup>12</sup> Other systems of aristocratic slavery had other measures. In precolonial equatorial Africa, Jane Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga have argued, political power and historical progress were measured as wealth in knowledge rather than wealth in people. Rather than accumulating numbers of people, the leaders of kingdoms like that of the Kongo enhanced their power by acquiring, through capture or purchase, people with different types of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

The African and European merchant slave traders with whom these kingdoms sometimes did business had still other ways of measuring the trade and imagining the history they were making: sacred time measured against an injunction to enslave non-Islamic outsiders or propelled by the "providence" of a Christian God; political history imagined as the conquest of monopoly rights along the African coast and market position in the Americas; market time imagined in macroeconomic cycles of depression and speculation; the microeconomic time of the slave trader, progress tracked across the pages of the ship's log, days defined by the weather and ship's speed, nights marked by the number of slaves who died in the hold—time reckoned in dead bodies and lost profits.<sup>14</sup>

For many of the slaves who were packed into the holds of the Atlantic slave ships, we can imagine still another set of temporal frames: those derived from local political histories of war and slave-raiding; a cultural cycle of social death and rebirth, the ethnic and political disorientation of capture and separation eventually giving way to new identifications with "ship-

mates" and "fictive kin", a biographical culmination of lifetime fears of capture, kidnapping, or simply of falling through the cracks in the protections of patronage and kinship; the metaphysical horror of a "middle" passage journey that some must have thought would never end and others might only have recognized as a trip across the *kalunga*, the body of water that separated the world of the living from that of the dead—a flight from time measured in the gradual physical deterioration of the worldly body.<sup>15</sup> And so on: as many journeys on a single ship as there were ways to imagine the journey.

Each of the narratives of slavery described above represents a dimension of that confrontation, a way of being in time—a temporality—according to which historical actors made sense of what it was that was happening (God's Providence, the main chance, social death, etc.) and how they would respond at any given moment.<sup>16</sup> These temporalities were layered, intertwined, and mixed through the process of the slave trade, sometimes running concurrently, sometimes oppositionally, tangled together by a historical process that none of them alone sufficed to describe. None of this should be taken to suggest that societies are unified in their temporalities, still less that there was a simple division between a circular premodern African time and a linear modern European time.<sup>17</sup> Quite the contrary. Taking time seriously suggests that "the slave trade" was not a single thing that might be viewed from a European perspective and an African perspective (or a global perspective and a local perspective, or a systemic perspective and an individual perspective) and then summed up into a whole—the way one might walk around a physical object, measure every face, and create a three-dimensional diagram. Rather, like a web of unforeseen connections, the historical shape of the slave trade depended upon the point of entry. Time ran differently depending upon where you started the clock.

Lived history, I am suggesting, is produced out of the clash of contending temporalities. These temporalities, however, must be seen as being themselves historical. Rather than marking the difference between timeless cultural essences—African time and European time—they reflect the politically and historically embedded circuits through which they were transmitted. And because they were historically shaped and politically situated, it is not enough to simply set these temporalities side by side and split the difference. The history of time is one of continual contest: a history of arguments about history; of efforts to control events by controlling the terms of their description; of situated and sometimes violent acts of synchronization; of forcible reeducation, resistant appropriation, and everyday negotiation; of conflicts in which time itself was a dimension of contest.

As a way of illustrating the historical politics of time-making, I'd like to use the space I have left to consider briefly two aspects of the temporal

politics of American slavery: the temporal dimension of slaveholders' domination and the way that slave rebels tried to make history by imagining themselves into time. As recent observers have noted, one of the many things slaveholders thought they owned was their slaves' time; indeed, to outline the temporal claims that slaveholders made upon their slaves is to draw a multidimensional portrait of slavery itself. Slaveholders, of course, defined the shape of the day. Whether it ran from sunup to sundown, it was defined by the tasks that had to be done by its close or was measured out in job-scaled clock time. Slavery's daily time was delineated by the master and often enforced by violence. Those who turned out late, quit early, worked too slowly, came up short, or failed to wait deferentially while the master attended to other things were cajoled, beaten, or starved into matching the daily rhythms through which their owners measured progress.<sup>18</sup> As well as quotidian time, slaveholders claimed calendar time as their own. They decided which days would be work days and which days would be holidays (or holy days); they enforced a cycle of planting, growing, and harvesting timed around their crop cycles and commercial plans; they fractured their slaves' lives and communities with their own cycle of yearly hires and calendar-termed financial obligations.<sup>19</sup> And slaveholders thought they owned their slaves' biographical time: they recorded their slaves' birthdays in accounts books that only they could see; they determined at what age their slaves would be started into the fields or set to a trade, when their slaves would be cajoled into reproduction, how many years they would be allowed to nurse the children they had, and how old they would have to be before retiring; they reproduced their own family legacies over time out of the broken pieces of slave families and communities divided by sale and estate settlement.<sup>20</sup> They infused their slaves' lives with their own time; through the daily process of slave discipline, the foreign, the young, and the resistant were forcibly inculcated with the nested temporal rhythms of their enslavement.

As with any dimension of power, however, time could be turned back upon its master. By working slowly, delaying conception, shamming sickness, or slipping off, slaves short-circuited their master's algorithms of temporal progress. By using the time at the end of the day to cultivate their own plots, sell their produce, or visit their family members, slaves wedged their own concerns into the interstices of their enslavement.<sup>21</sup> By naming their children after the day of their birth (traditional among Gold Coast slaves) or giving them the names of ancestors, they reconstituted fractured links with their pasts and their families.<sup>22</sup> By adhering to the protocols of living with ancestors present in time and space, obeying the demands of moments that were themselves portentous of the success or failure of any action undertaken, and observing the injunctions and respecting the power of *obeah* men and conjurers, by finding time within the day to put down a

rug, face Mecca, and pray, or by keeping the Sabbath for the Christian God, they bent themselves to systems of temporal discipline outside their slavery.<sup>23</sup>

The temporal conflicts between slaves and slaveholders were resolved by a series of running compromises made at the scale of everyday life. Through acts of passive resistance like slowing down and of active defiance like running away, slaves were able to use a portion of the day for visiting, worshipping, provisioning, or simply resting.<sup>24</sup> The boundaries of the possible, however, were hedged by slaveholders' willingness to enforce their own ideas of time through force. In fact, by attributing their slaves' failure to work as hard, as eagerly, or as long as they wanted to savagery, primitivism, and biological lassitude, slaveholders invested their own everyday politics of labor discipline with the force of natural history.<sup>25</sup> On the surface, at least, enslaved Africans were being dragged into their masters' history, forced into temporal frames of reference defined by slavery and race.

Occasionally, however, these everyday conflicts gave way to the broader, historical acts of resistance that historians have called slave revolts. These events have generally been explained according to one of two grand narratives of African-American history: the story of how black slavery was superseded by "freedom" or the story of how Africans became African Americans. The first narrative has emphasized the commonality of the oppressions visited upon enslaved people over the differences between them and treated events disparate in time and space—the Maroon wars in Jamaica (1690–1740; 1795–96) and Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia (1831), for example—as similar phenomena, part, at bottom, of the same broad history of the attempt of enslaved people to gain their freedom.<sup>26</sup> The second narrative has framed the history of these events as part of a broader story of acculturation—the transformation of Africans into African Americans—and used the cultural content of New World slave revolts to measure the progress of this ongoing transformation at a series of stops along the way.<sup>27</sup> There is no doubt that both of these explanatory paradigms are instructive: there were, as I have argued above, certain material and ideological features common to merchant slavery that were shared by all of the Atlantic slave societies; and African populations in the New World *did* become African-American, a change that *was* reflected in their collective lives and their revolts.

And yet neither of these stories fully exhaust the historical content of the events they seek to explain. The set of explanations that emphasizes the similarities between slave rebels and their sequential struggle toward "freedom" has glossed over very real differences (over space and time) in the ideologies that defined the purposes of collective revolt, leaving a host of questions to go begging—if the Jamaican Maroon chiefan Cudjoe had

met the Christian millenarian Nat Turner, what would they have said to each other? Would Cudjoe have tried to capture Turner and return him to his owner in order to protect his own community from slaveholders' reprisals? Would Turner have tried to convert Cudjoe or struck him down with all of the force of the Christian millennium? Nor, however, can the other set of (culturalist) accounts fully contain the complex history of these events. They cannot, for instance, explain either why New World slave rebels were almost exclusively male or why those conspirators were so often betrayed by their fellow slaves. They cannot, that is, explain why women or nonconspirators, who were presumably as African or African-American as their rebellious counterparts at any given moment in time, were not visible on the leading edge of what historians have taken to be their history.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, scarcely concealed in the contrasting outlines of these separate sets of explanations is a single story of progress: the metanarrative of racial liberalism—the story of black freedom and racial acculturation, of how black slaves became American citizens.<sup>29</sup> In treating slave revolts as a way to take the temperature of a historical process with a foreordained outcome, historians have often overlooked the way that the slaves themselves imagined the history that they were making—the arguments and politics, the historical process, through which they imagined themselves into time.<sup>30</sup> Historians, that is, have reworked the history of the rebels who were willing to risk their lives to escape from American history into a part of that history.

Excavating the internal politics of slave conspiracies from an archival record produced by slaveholders requires careful reading. The most detailed accounts we have of the way that slaves talked to one another about conspiracy and rebellion come from the records of the trials that followed the discovery of their plans: they are accounts shaped by slaveholders' fevered projections of their slaves' unfathomed purposes, by the terror of slaves whose lives depended upon the extent to which their confessions matched the expectations of their inquisitors, and by the torture riven so deeply into the archival record of Southern "justice." And yet, as anyone who has ever told a lie can tell you, the best way to make a story seem true is to build it out of pieces of the truth. Read against the grain, the conspiracy probes provide a sense of what slaves knew of the nature of slave conspiracies—where they happened, who was likely to be involved and what their plans would be, and, most important for our purposes here, what kinds of reasons slaves gave to one another as they argued about what they should do, to whom, and when. If we wish to understand the practical complexity and political philosophy of New World slave conspiracies, the trial records are our best source.<sup>31</sup>

The most elementary point that emerges from those records is that talk about subversive ideas and rebellious plans had to occur off the grid of everyday life: at the margins of a landscape defined by slavery and in the

interstices of weeks, days, and even hours structured by slaveholders' demands. Plans for Gabriel's Revolt (1800) in Virginia, for example, were apparently discussed at riverside taverns on the James and at revival meetings and picnics in the countryside out of sight of white Richmond, and spread by mobile skilled slaves, men with abroad marriages that gave them an excuse to travel between plantations, and a network of enslaved rivermen. The Demerara Revolt (1823) in British Guyana was plotted at slave-led Sunday school meetings sponsored by the London Missionary Society, hushed encounters between slaves whose work took them to town, and in the large uncultivated spaces between plantations; news was spread through an interlocking set of connections between kin networks, mobile skilled and hired slaves, churchgoing slaves and, apparently, the colony's large population of Coramantee slaves.<sup>32</sup>

The discussions that traveled along this hybrid circuitry reflect the difficulty of the organizational task facing slave conspirators. Activating the existing circuitry of everyday life—family, community, and ethnicity—with the historical current of revolt was dangerous, and conspirators took a great deal of care to do it safely. In relating the shape of a conversation between two of the conspirators in Gabriel's Revolt, Douglas Egerton captures the tentative exchange of signs of dissatisfaction that could turn commiseration about the quotidian rigors of slavery into conspiracy. Egerton relates that the conversation in which Ben Woolfolk recruited King began with what must have been a commonplace discussion of King's dissatisfaction with the harsh discipline imposed by a new master. Woolfolk responded to King's comments with a series of non sequiturs that must have put King on the alert that something important was about to happen—"Are you a true man?" and "Can you keep an important secret?"—and when King didn't shirk from the direction the conversation was taking, Woolfolk escalated it to the point of conspiracy: "the Negroes are about to rise and fight the white people for our freedom."<sup>33</sup> In Denmark Vesey's Charleston (1822), the signal that subversive speech was about to begin seems to have been a question about "the news." Over and over again in the Vesey trial transcripts, the phrase "he asked me the news" is followed by accounts of the type of back-and-forth escalation that characterized the conversation between Ben Woolfolk and King. Other times, however, the ostensibly innocuous inquiry was shortly followed by answers that were not so much direct responses as attempts to end the conversation entirely: "I replied I don't know," or, "I said I could not answer," or, "I begged him to stop it," or, "I told him I did not understand such talk and stopped the conversation."<sup>34</sup> The signs that conspiratorial speech was beginning were apparently well known among Charleston slaves and viewed as being so explosive that some slaves wouldn't listen any further.

Indeed, the records of the trials that followed New World slave conspir-

acies are full of objections, of the arguments of slaves who tried to get the conspirators to slow down, leave off, or just leave them alone—of slaves who took a different view of the moment in time. Some were simply afraid to die: "I said I did not want death to take me yet and I quit him," remembered Patrick of a conversation with a man who tried to recruit him on the street. Some framed their objections in strictly pragmatic terms, saying they would join once it was apparent that the rebellion was going to succeed, but not before. Some felt bound by family obligations; asked if he would join Vesey's army, Bram responded, "I was so bound to my father that I could not go without his leave." Others clung to notions of justice and moral conduct that were a familiar feature of their everyday lives but were out of step with the plans of the conspirators. Acts that were axiomatic if you accepted Vesey's definition of the relation between master and slave as a state of "war," for instance, were murder if you did not. Many of those present at a meeting where Vesey outlined his plans remembered that, in the words of Jesse, "some said they thought that it was cruel to kill the ministers and the women and the children."<sup>35</sup> Still others remained divided from the rebels by local, historical, or traditional antagonisms: the Demerara revolt was apparently shot through with the suspicion that field slaves had of their enslaved drivers, that Creoles had of Africans, that the members of one chapel had of the members of another, and that many of those who revolted had of Muslims.

And, finally, there were those who were certain that the time just was not right. In Demerara, Daniel advised conspirators who approached him for help that they should wait for freedom rather than trying to seize it: if it was "a thing ordained by the Almighty," it would come in time. In the aftermath of Gabriel's Rebellion, Ben Woolfolk reported that he had advised his fellows to postpone their plans, because "I had heard that in the days of old, when the Israelites were in Servitude to King Pharaoh, they were taken from him by the Power of God—and were carried away by Moses—God blessed them with an angel to go with him, but that I could see nothing of the kind in these days."<sup>36</sup> Framed as a matter of political organization, and viewed in light of the objections of reluctant slaves, the magnitude of the achievement of slave rebels in the New World is brought into sharper relief. Their task was nothing less than to compress the various scales of time running through the everyday life of slavery—the biographical, tribal, metaphysical, and other definitions of self and situation evident in the objections of these reluctant conspirators—into the focused immediacy of a single shared imperative.

Given the extraordinary complexity of the layered temporalities evident in the objections of nonconspirators, it took feats of extraordinary imagination (and sometimes intimidation) to synchronize slaves into a shared account of what was happening and what was to be done about it. Indeed,

the shared accounts of time and history for which enslaved conspirators risked their lives and by which subsequent historians have measured their progress along the path from African to American were as much effects as they were causes of the process of revol. When the Bambara leaders of the Natchez Uprising (1731) or the Kongolese warriors at Stono (1739) or the Coramante rebels in Jamaica (1760), for example, prepared themselves for war through the sacred practices of their homelands, they were making an argument rather than proceeding according to a timeless cultural script known and readily accepted by all of their fellow slaves. As they drummed, danced, swore oaths, assigned ranks, and made plans to enslave rival groups, they were, through ritual practice at the scale of everyday life, giving a moment in time an identifiable historical shape: that of a war.<sup>37</sup> Not only that, they were doing so in a specifically male ritual idiom that underwrote the authority of male warriors to tell everybody else what to do. They were making a politically situated claim on the right to determine the proper correct collective response: this is a war and we are in charge.<sup>38</sup> New World slave rebels were making history by remaking time.

The history slave conspirators tried to make changed shape over time. In Haiti (1791–1804), Toussaint L'Ouverture joined his black followers to the revolution in the rights of man that was remaking the Atlantic world.<sup>39</sup> Gabriel in Virginia and Denmark Vesey in South Carolina imagined their own histories as continuation of the revolution begun in Haiti. Vesey, in fact, courted uncertain slaves by reading to them from the newspapers about the freedoms of Haitian blacks, advertising that he had written to the leaders of the black republic requesting military support, and promising that, in the words of two of the conspirators, "Santo Domingo and Africa will help us to get out liberty" by sending ships to carry them to Haiti, where "they would receive and protect them."<sup>40</sup> Effectively, Vesey was inviting his co-conspirators to join him in fighting their way out of the history of slavery and into that of a new Black Atlantic, or, as he put it, the "war" between the "blacks" and the "whites." In Southampton County, Virginia, Nat Turner followed a series of signs—marks on his own head and breast from the time of his birth, the voice of the Holy Spirit, drops of blood on the corn in the fields and hieroglyphs on the leaves in the woods, a crashing thunder in the sky in April of 1828, and a total eclipse of the sun in February of 1831—to the millennial recognition that "the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first."<sup>41</sup> Rather than tracing out points along a foreordained path of historical development, these rebels were investing their everyday lives with temporal purpose—cracking moments open and giving them the shape of imperatives.<sup>42</sup>

In practice, none of these versions of cause and consequence had the simplicity of a pure form; the most successful of the nineteenth-century

conspirators, at least, were those who could loosely gather a number of alternative accounts of what exactly it was that was happening into the common purpose of making whatever it was happen. Gabriel, whom the historian Douglas Egerton has identified as a "black Jacobin" seeking to pull Virginia into the history of black liberation that had begun in Haiti, was able to abide, if not himself articulate, other versions of the struggle. When challenged about his choice of the day upon which the slaves were to rise in arms, Gabriel turned to his brother, Martin, who settled the question in terms that were at once prophetic, pragmatic, and deeply personal: "There was this expression in the Bible—delay breeds danger . . . the soldiers were discharged, and the Arms all put away—there was no patrolling . . . and before he would any longer bear what he had borne he would turn out and fight with a stick." And when challenged again: "I read in my Bible where God says, if we will worship him, we should have peace in all our Lands, five of you shall conquer a hundred, and a hundred, a thousand of our enemies."<sup>43</sup>

Vesey, whose own ideology apparently synthesized the divided tribal legacies of South Carolina slaves into a revolutionary call for the liberation of a new historical subject, "the blacks," nevertheless organized some of his men into an "Ebo company" and a "Gullah company," the latter led by the conjurer "Cullah" Jack Pritchard.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Vesey seems to have been remarkable for the number of temporal scales he could invoke in making the argument that the time for armed rising had come—or, even, in answering a single question. Among those who were present when Vesey was asked whether ministers, women, and children should be killed, there were slaves who recalled at least three versions of temporal scale of his response. "He then read in the Bible where God commanded, that all should be cut off, both men, women, and children, and said, he believed, it was no sin for us to do so, for the lord had commanded us to do it," remembered Rolla. "He thought it was for our safety not to spare one white skin alive, for this was the plan they pursued in St. Domingo," remembered Jesse. "Smart asked him if you were going to kill the women and children—Denmark answered what was the use of killing the louse and leaving the nit—Smart said, my God, what a sin—Vesey told Smart he had not a man's heart, told Smart that he was a friend to Buckra," read Smart Anderson's account of the meeting.<sup>45</sup>

Even Nat Turner was not above relying on the intricate complexities of psychological domination that characterized the daily life of slavery to help him clear the path for God's unfolding Providence—"Jack, I knew, was only a tool in the hands of Hark," he said of one of the slaves whom he entrusted with his plans.<sup>46</sup> Working their way up and down scales of time—metaphysical, political, local, psychological—the theorists of New World slave conspiracies were able to urge any number of historical agents—a tribal

warrior, a Christian soldier, a liberal individual, a black man—to anneal themselves to the gathered strength of a single struggle.

When, in the aftermath of events, slaveholders tried to figure out what had caused the uprisings that had convulsed their societies, slaveholders restaged them as effects of their own agency rather than that of their slaves: *they* had allowed their slaves too much liberty (or not enough); *they* had given their slaves too much access to Christianity (or not enough); *they* had provided for too few patrols or allowed too many black seamen or poor whites or Frenchmen or missionaries or steam doctors or Yankee peddlers to come into contact with their slaves. They told themselves stories about what happened that emphasized their own agency and reworked the unfathomed aspirations of their slaves, whether they were African, Jacobin, or millenarian, into a part of history as they recognized it—the ongoing history of New World slavery.<sup>47</sup> And, as I have argued, historians have often taken the slaveholders at their word and written these events into the history of American slavery as accounts of a labor force in arms. But look again and these conspiracies look like battle plans in a war for control of the New World, efforts to force Euro-Americans into another place in time: into the well-grooved tribal histories of African wars to determine who would be slave and who would be master; the history of the Black Atlantic that had begun in Haiti with the idea that freedom (rather than mastery) was the opposite of slavery; or the Christian millenarian history in which the first would be last and the last would be first. The term “slave revolt” is less a description of these events than the naming by one side—the winning side—of a bloody conflict characterized by the clash of alternative understandings of exactly what it was that was at stake in the Americas.

History, to paraphrase the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, is a temporality backed by superior firepower.<sup>48</sup> Upon even the most casual observation, it is obvious that the promise of liberal equality that lies at the end of the progress narratives that frame so many American histories—the continual progress of “acculturation” and the succession of slavery by “freedom”—provides an inadequate account of the complexities and restricted possibilities of African-American life at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Indeed, outside the academy, these liberal metanarratives have been displaced by a set of historical counterpractices. The science fiction supernaturalism of Elijah Muhammad or the Afrocentric essentialism of Molefi Kete Asante, for example, contest the story of gradual acculturation that frames so many scholarly histories of the black experience. Similarly, popular histories that frame the slave trade as a single element of an ongoing *Mafia*, an African Holocaust, and emphasize its immediate psychological and emotional relevance to the contemporary black experience contest the redemptive linearity that frames the slavery-to-freedom narrative of Amer-

ican history. Finally, the call for reparations being made by historians like Sam Anderson emphasizes a counterhistory in which slavery cannot be said to have ended in 1865, but persists in African-American oppression, in the bitter fruit of its own unpaid debt, in the present day. In the words of the historian John Henrik Clarke: “The events which transpired five thousand years ago, five years ago, or five minutes ago, have determined what will happen five minutes from now, five years from now, or five thousand years from now. All history is a current event.”<sup>49</sup> Seen in the light of the historian Robin D. G. Kelley’s admonition that it is less important to debunk anti-historicist histories than it is to understand the source of their attraction for their adherents, these histories seem irruptive reminders of the possibilities suppressed by the forcible superimposition of European history that began with the slave trade.<sup>50</sup>

To say so is not to suggest we can step out of time and return to the lost temporalities of the past. It would, in any case, be a mistake wholly to abandon the liberal historical narratives that have supported what compensation African Americans have been able to exact for past wrongs. To emphasize that history-making itself is as an integral part of historical process is, however, to urge that scholarly history writing be punctuated by constant reminders of its own historicity, and of its complicity in events that it often purports to describe from a perspective of archimedean neutrality. At a time when there are estimated to be twenty-seven million slaves servicing the global economy, we do well to heed the warning that the meta-narrative of liberal individualism that has shaped so many of our existing histories might not be either linear or irreversible.<sup>51</sup>

#### NOTES

1. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Robert J. Allison (New York: 1995), 53–54; see also the stories of Job Ben Solomon (p. 57) and Joseph Wright (p. 331) in *Africa Remembered: Narratives of West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. Philip D. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967). “It was the Same as Pigs in a Sty: A Young African’s Account of Life on a Slave Ship,” in *Children of God’s Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*, ed. Robert Conrad (Princeton, 1984), 39; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge, 1992), 161; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 160, where it is argued that fears of being made into oil and eaten were common among slaves in the trade; and Charles Piot, “Of Slaves and the Gift: Kabre Sale of Kin and the Era of the Slave Trade,” *Journal of African History* 37 (1996): 38.

2. *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 33, 44.

3. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, 1983). See also Wai-Chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 17–20; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for the Indian Past?" *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London, 1995); *Power of Development*, ed. Jonathan Crush (London, 1995); Reynaldo C. Ileto, "Outline of a Non-linear Emplotment in Philippine History," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, 1997), 98–131; and Maria Josepha Saldana-Portillo, "Developmentalism's Irresistible Seduction—Rural Subjectivity under Sandanista Agricultural Policy," *ibid.*, 132–72.

4. Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge, 1990). My thanks to Mia Bay for her pointed comments about contemporary slave trading.

5. See Joseph C. Miller, *The Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison, 1988). Miller makes the further point that mortality in the First Passage was tremendous and must be considered alongside exportation if the demographic impact of the slave trade in Africa is to be fully reckoned. See also Stephanie Ellen Smallwood, "Salt-Water Slaves: African Enslavement, Forced Migration, and Settlement in the Anglo-American World, 1660–1700" (Ph.D., diss., Duke University, 1999), 15–128.

6. See, e.g., James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York, 1981), and David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge, 1986). The unwitting prominence given to the slave traders' definition of the trade in these and many other accounts has to do with the fact that they limit themselves to treating it as an economic and demographic phenomenon, as well as with their reliance solely upon the records generated by the trade itself, an example of what the historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot has called "archival power," the material power that past actors have over their future through the records they create and keep. See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 31–69.

7. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (New York, 1972); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York, 1983).

8. Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold*, trans. Alide Dansonis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Meillassoux does not share the view of precolonial African slavery described in the following sentences.

9. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. id. (Madison, 1977), 3–69; Jonathan Glasman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," *Journal of African History* 32 (1991): 277–312; Jane I. Guyer, "Wealth in People and Self-Realization in Equatorial Africa," *Man*, 28 (1993), 243–65; Jane I. Guyer, "Wealth in People,

Wealth in Things," *Journal of African History*, 36 (1995), 83–90; Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Competition in Equatorial Africa," *Journal of African History* 36 (1995): 91–120; Piot, "Of Slaves and the Gift," 31–49.

10. See David Ross, "The Dahomean Middleman System, 1727–c. 1818," *Journal of African History* 28 (1987): 357–75; Robin Law, "Slave-raiders and Middlemen: Monopolists and Free Traders: The Supply of Slaves for the Atlantic Trade in Dahomey, c. 1715–1850," *Journal of African History* 30 (1989): 45–68; Miller, *Way of Death*, 40–49, 108–28; Meillassoux, *Anthropology of Slavery*, 237–323; and Steve Feierman, "Africa in History: The End of Universal Narratives" in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, 1994), 40–65. From the other side of the Atlantic, see Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African American Society in Mainland North America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996): 251–88; Smallwood, "Salt-Water Slaves," 60–128.

11. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth-Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), *passim*; see also Smallwood, "Salt-Water Slaves," 127.

12. Robin Law, "History and Legitimacy: Aspects of the Use of the Past in Pre-colonial Dahomey," *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 431–65; see also Ivor Wilkes, "On Mentally Mapping Greater Asante: A Study of Time and Motion," *Journal of African History* 33 (1992): 175–90.

13. Guyer and Belinga, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge," 108–19.

14. See Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves*; Miller, *Way of Death*; Ross, "Dahomean Middleman System"; Law, "Slave-Raiders and Middlemen"; on Islam as a "merchant ideology," see Meillassoux, *Anthropology of Slavery*, 243–48; on the slave trade as "providence," see "The Narrative of Samuel Ajayi Crowther," in *Africa Re-membered*, ed. Curtin, 299.

15. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death, A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, 1982); T. C. McCaskie, "Time and the Calendar in Nineteenth-Century Asante: An Exploratory Essay," *History in Africa* 7 (1980): 179–200; Joseph K. Adjaye, "Time, the Calendar, and History among the Akan of Ghana," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 15 (1987): 71–100; Richard Price, *First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American* (Baltimore, 1983) and *Alabi's World* (Baltimore, 1990); Smallwood, "Salt-Water Slaves," 129–90; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 147, 160.

16. On temporality, see Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotopes in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), 84–258; Fernand Braudel, "Time, History, and the Social Sciences," in *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present*, ed. Fritz Stern (1956; rev. ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 403–29; the essays in John Bender and David E. Wellerby, *Chronotopes: The Construction of Time* (Stanford, 1991), and *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Timespace*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis, 1994). See also E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 56–97; Jacques LeGoff, "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages" and "Labor Time in the 'Crisis' of the Fourteenth Century: from Medieval Time to Modern Time," in his

*Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1980), 29–52; Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York, 1990); Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge, 1993); Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill, 1997); and Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," *Public Culture* 11 (1999): 245–68.

17. European markets, after all, inscribe time in cycles, as does the sacred time of Christianity—the cycle of death and rebirth yearly recapitulated through the ritual calendar. And there are plenty of example of linear time reckoning in "pre-modern" African history: work oriented around the accomplishment of specific tasks and the stone-accumulating censuses of the Dahomean kings being only the most obvious. See, generally, LeGoff, "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages," 29–42; Akhil Gupta, "The Reincarnation of Souls and the Rebirth of Commodities: Representations of Time in 'East' and 'West,'" *Cultural Critique* 22 (1992): 187–211; see also Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Indian Historiography Is Good to Think," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (Ann Arbor, 1992), 353–88. For the idea that "Christianization introduced Africans to a sense of history moving linearly" (with which I am disagreeing), see Mullin, *Africa in America*, 275.

18. For time and "work-discipline" in American slavery, see Smith, *Mastered by the Clock*, esp. 93–128, and Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 172–94.

19. On crop and commercial calendars, see Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 147–72, Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Democratic Slave Rebellion of 1833* (New York, 1994), 171, and Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge, 1993), 39–45, 213–14; on hiring, see Charles B. Dew, *Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge* (New York, 1994), 67–70; on credit relations, see Richard Holcombe Kibbourne, Jr., *Debt, Investment, and Slaves: Credit Relations in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, 1825–1885* (Tuscaloosa, 1995), 49–74.

20. See Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985), 91–118; da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 65–68, 117; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, 1999), 78–116.

21. Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, 1987), 15–67; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?* 104–10; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 48–50, 153–55, 183–84, 191–93, 359–76; and da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 75–85, 115–18.

22. Adjeje, "Time, the Calendar, and History among the Akan of Ghana," 71–95; Smallwood, "Salt-Water Slaves," 317–19; Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 185–201.

23. Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 171–226; Mullin, *Africa in America*, 175–84, 201–2; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 2–3, 55–56, 59, 249, 283–90; da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 176–77, 271.

24. Ira Berlin, *Mary Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North*

*America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1998), 2–6; da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 61–80.

25. See, e.g., Samuel Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *DeBow's Review* 11 (1851): 64–69, 212–13, 331–37; "Philosophy of the Negro Constitution," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 9 (1852): 195–208, and "Ethnology of the Negro of Prognathous Race," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 15 (1858): 149–63. On the idea that ideas of historical alterity can develop out of everyday conflicts over time discipline, see Frederick Cooper, "Colonizing Time: Work Rhythms and Labor Conflict in Colonial Mombasa," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Dirks, 209–45; and Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (London, 1993); Smith, *Mastered by the Clock*, 132.

26. See, e.g., Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943; 6th ed., New York, 1996); Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New World* (Baton Rouge, 1979); and Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982). It may, at first glance, seem unfair to describe *From Rebellion to Revolution* as a book that emphasizes the commonality between enslaved people distant in place and time from one another over their cultural differences, since it is, in fact, a book that is framed around the contrast between African and African-American styles of revolt—or, more accurately, between "traditional" and "modern" styles of revolt. The book, however, is also framed by a strict teleology that labels "African" or "traditional" revolts as "reactionary impediments" to the "development of productive forces" (p. 82). Beneath the book's narrative of cultural transformation lies the idea that those who laid down their lives in the New World, be they African or African-American, were, at bottom, slaves. The closer they came to that recognition, the further along the continuum of "progress" toward genuine self-realization Genovese locates them.

27. See, e.g., Mullin, *Africa in America*, and Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspirators of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, 1993).

28. On these points, see James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810* (Cambridge, 1997), 87–116.

29. Genovese is a complicated thinker and it may seem strange to describe his avowedly Marxist progress narrative as contributing, even unwittingly, to a "liberal" metanarrative. The point, however, is much less about Genovese's intention (or his politics) than it is about the capacity of an unarticulated set of assumptions about the course of history—a set of assumptions derived from a European history framed around the succession of modes of production, the development of the nation-state, and the emergence liberal notion of citizenship (hence the "progressive" character of slave revolts framed in the language of "the rights of man")—to organize a type of question historians ask and a type of question they ignore. For "liberal developmentalism" as a historical metanarrative immanent in the work of Marxist and other scholars, see Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History."

30. The best account of a slave revolt as a process of political organization remains C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; 2d rev. ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1963). Notable recent examples, to my way of thinking, are Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek*, da

Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, and Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*. For the argument that I am making—that the realm of “politics” is where historical subjectivities are argued over and articulated—see Stuart Hall, “The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists,” in *Marrism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, 1988), 35–57.

31. On the inability of slaveholders (and subsequently historians) to imagine their slaves’ motivations, see Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 70–107; on torture and testimony, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985), and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1997); for examples of historians’ effort to read terror-shaped sources against the grain, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1980), and Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek*.

32. Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 29, 53–65, 119–23; Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 61–70; da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 190–96.

33. Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 56–57. For more on the conversational protocol of plotting a conspiracy, see Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 71–76.

34. *An Official Report of the Trials of Sunday Negroes Charged with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South Carolina. Preceded by an Introduction and Narrative: And, in an Appendix, a Report of the Trials of Four White Persons on Indictments for Attempting to Excite the Slaves to Insurrection*, ed. Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker (Charleston: James R. Schenck, 1822), 45; 50, 62, 68. Those who testified that they had demurred at the first mention of “the news” had good reason to lie: their lives hung in the balance. But even if they were lying, the shared structure of their reckonings—the conversational feint of asking about “the news,” followed by the suggestion that the conversation be immediately terminated—seems to me to reflect what must have been a shared protocol for regulating the flow of seditious speech.

35. *Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Se—ve Conspiracy of 1822*, ed. Edward A. Pearson (Chapel Hill, 1999), 172, 195; *Official Report*, ed. Kennedy and Parker, 59, 68, 90. A similar boundary between acts of war and murder was invoked by Harry Haig, an active participant in the Vesey conspiracy, who had nevertheless refused an order from Jack Pritchard to poison his master’s pump (*Official Report*, 79): “I refused to poison as I considered that murder and God would not pardon me ‘twas not like fair fighting.”

36. Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 195, 186; Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 76–77.

37. Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 97–118; John K. Thornton, “African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion,” *American Historical Review* 96 (October 1991): 1101–13; Mullin, *Africa in America*, 40–42. See also Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 11.

38. On sex-specific societies, see Francesca Declich, “‘Gendered Narratives,’ History, and Identity: Two Centuries along the Juba River among the Ziegula and Shamabra,” *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 93–122, and Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 94–102.

39. See James, *Black Jacobins*. It is interesting to note that James continually (see 108, 117, 125, 146, and 394) downplays evidence of “African” definitions of the rebellion in Haiti.

40. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 95; Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 257–66; *Official Report*, ed. Kennedy and Parker, 28, 42, 59, 68 (quotations on 42 and 59). See also Julius S. Scott, “Afro-American Sailors and the International Communication Network: The Case of Newport Bowers,” in *Jack Tar in History: Essays in Maritime History*, ed. Colin Howell and Richard J. Twomey (Frederickton, New Brunswick: Academistis Press, 1991), 11–36.

41. *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenberg (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 46–48.

42. Walter Benjamin puts it this way: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ . . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain the image of the past which unexpectedly appears to [a] man singled out by history at a moment of danger.” Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.

43. Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 76–77; Sidbury identifies the source for Martin’s second statement as Leviticus 26:6–8.

44. For the racial ideology and tribal organization of the Vesey conspiracy, see Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 1–3.

45. *Official Report*, ed. Kennedy and Parker, 46, 59, 90.

46. *Confessions of Nat Turner*, ed. Greenberg, 48.

47. See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 70–107.

48. Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” 20–21.

49. See Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, with Alex Haley (New York, 1965); Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia, 1987); S. E. Anderson, *The Black Holocaust for Beginners* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1995); www.ncobra.com (website for National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America); www.maafa.org; www.swagga.com. I am grateful to the participants in the 1999 NYU/Faculty Resource Network seminar on United States History in International Perspective for thoughtful comments on issues of narrative and periodization in African-American history.

50. See Robin D. G. Kelley, “Looking Backward: 2097–1997,” in his *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 159–80.

51. The figure of twenty-seven million slaves is drawn from Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 8.