

Rituals, Runaways, and the Haitian Revolution: Collective Action in the African Diaspora

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Crystal Eddins' *Rituals, Runaways, and the Haitian Revolution: Collective Action in the African Diaspora* analyses the rituals and collective practices of meaning-making of enslaved people and maroon communities in Saint Domingue. Beautifully written and creatively using a diverse set of archives, the book provides a stunning insight into the life-worlds of captives, their networks of solidarity, and their cosmologies, cultures, and knowledges, amidst conditions of violent exploitation and domination. Reminiscent of Julius Scott's (2020) pathbreaking *The Common Wind*, Eddins traces the connections between people in the years prior to what would eventually become the Haitian Revolution; and in so doing, the book makes an innovative contribution to the historiography of Saint Domingue, and the study of slavery and Black diasporas. Importantly, the book is also essential reading for sociologists.

As the Haitian historian and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015) pointed out, the narrative of the Haitian Revolution has been silenced not only at the time of its occurrence, but also by social scientists in the centuries following the uprising. Trouillot noted that the silencing of the Haitian Revolution was not accidental, but instead necessary to maintain the progress-driven narrative of the West; and that the silencing of the Haitian Revolution would continue 'as long as the history of the West is not retold in ways that bring forward the perspective of the world' (Trouillot, 2015, p.107). Important narratives of racial slavery, resistance, and the Haitian Revolution, such as C.L.R. James' (1989) *Black Jacobins*, have been marginalized within Sociology, and have tended to remain disconnected from the questions of revolutions, capitalism, and political modernity at large. More recently, social scientists have begun to trouble the knowledge politics at the heart of this silencing of the Haitian Revolution and sought to embrace the theoretical insights of Haiti for our conceptions of racial capitalism and liberation struggles worldwide (Bhambra, 2016; Getachew, 2016; Hammer & White, 2019; Lawson, 2015). *Rituals, Runaways, and the Haitian Revolution* builds on this turn, but also takes a step further in providing novel primary research of the decades prior to the revolution.

Eddins asks how the enslaved built collectivities and solidarities within the structures of plantation violence in Saint Domingue. She explains how people negotiated cultural, linguistic, and religious differences: while simultaneously holding on to feelings of belonging to groups, people overcame these boundaries to build racial solidarity and resistance. These collectivities, she shows, emerged in practice—through rituals, gatherings, martial arts, dances, and weddings—and people built a sense of solidarity *from below*. Importantly, while historiographies have often tended to separate maroon communities from the enslaved, Eddins shows how through these shared rituals and practices, people were able to establish connections across these experiences. While people did hold on to their different group belonging, Eddins makes the case that shared practices led to mutual recognition, which eventually sustained

collective revolutionary action. In this way, Eddins makes a central contribution to scholarship on the Haitian revolution, showing how captives did not remain in segregated groups but rather created a sense of we-ness that would become central to the revolutionary uprising, and then also underlie the making of the Haitian nation.

One of the most creative uses of historical data, Eddins uses the archive of fugitive advertisements to give a deeper understanding of the prevalence of marronage throughout 18th century Saint Domingue. Reading these fugitive announcements against the grain, Eddins traces the paths maroons took to seek refuge, and shows how and to where maroons were able to escape. Marronage, Eddins makes clear, was one way in which enslaved people were able to 'reclaim possession of themselves' (p.183). Taking themselves out of the plantation world—even if only for a limited amount of time—meant that they escaped their classification as capital, the policing of their time, and their labor exploitation, thus, invoking Sylvia Wynter (2003), laying claim to their own humanity. In a violent and overdetermined plantation system, they forged a struggle for freedom, based in shared collectivities.

The book in many ways understates its significance for Sociology. Beyond its central contributions to the historiography of Saint Domingue, Eddins raises central questions for our analysis of racial capitalism, colonialism, and the study of the Black diaspora. In the face of a Hegelian narrative of 'Africa without history,' recuperating culture is foundational to reclaiming one's own history. It is in itself a step in the struggle towards liberation, because colonialism works by first attempting to eradicate culture and knowledge, while then claiming that there is no culture, or that history had already happened elsewhere. Through a creative approach to an archive tinged in violence, Eddins recuperates a collection of moments where people brought their knowledges and cultures to the fore and used them to create new collective practices to sustain themselves in the world of plantation slavery. In this way, the book does more than the social movements literature has traditionally asked: It is not only a question of building collective consciousness in revolutionary action; but rather it is a question of ordinary people doing so under conditions of colonialism, with a colonial archive organized to deny us these insights. Eddins' practice of reading the archive against the grain, which situates African knowledges and shared practices as central to revolutionary practice, is a major contribution to political sociology, but also to debates about epistemic violence. If, thinking with Cedric Robinson, racial capitalism has sought to wipe out cultures, knowledges and the lifeworlds of African captives, Eddins demonstrates how this process is only ever incomplete. The book helps us think through the transatlantic connections at the heart of this collective consciousness, showing how people at once brought their knowledges, while at the same time avoiding a static understanding of culture. In this way, the book raises questions that Sociology has so far failed to ask. Showcasing careful archival research, it contributes to the important work of recovering these practices, which in turn helps us build different lineages of freedom and resistance.

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