

Reading Log Week Seven
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HISTORY 1120-01
Dr. Tracy Penny Light
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In the journal article, “Acts of Resistance: Black Men and Women Engage Slavery in Upper Canada, 1793-1803” by Afua Cooper, the author passionately discusses how enslaved people took a stand for their overlooked worth. The black slaves of that time suffered and fought to stay alive under a society of privileged white people. Although this sounds like a case of victimization, the author argues that we must see the enslaved people as “active agents in their own emancipation.”

Many of the slaves tried to rise above their masters by rebelling against their orders. According to the text, the slaves tried to rise about their masters both collectively and individually. (6) An individual uprising was a self-empowered move that a slave took in order to preserve and protect their own lives. This included, but is not limited to, the breaking of tools, talking back to their owners, and procrastinating on big projects. This kind of uprising often had no long-term damage, but it did place a negative effect on their relationships with their masters. (6) Whereas, the people who lived out a collective uprising often suffered the long-term damage to their decisions. A few examples of long-term damage included homicide, revolts, and arson. Women and men had different roles within the rebellion, both of which served an important purpose to find freedom. Due to their gender, women were able to restrict fertility and birth control. Along with this, they were often associated with poisoning due to the nature of their jobs. Men were mainly blamed for arson, and the damage of property. (6)

According to the text, “Slavery was an inhuman system in which one group of persons permanently owned the life and labour of another group, and had the power of life and death over them.” (7) The enslaved people rebelled against their owners as a way to defend their own human rights. At the beginning of 1650, slavery was viewed from a racial scope, rather than one

of global human rights. Black skin was associated with slavery, and white people automatically lived at a benefit within that society. Slavery was often something that was inherited along the family line, which allowed for security for the slave owners status. (7) Women were forced to reproduce, and were often sexually abused by their enslavers. These slaves lived in survival mode for their entire lives, and chose not to accept the demeaning title that was handed down to them from a narcissistic society.

Chloe Cooley was an enslaved black woman who began a revolution that changed the history of slavery. On March 14th, 1793, Peter Martin, a freed black man, noticed her resisting the ones who were throwing her into a boat that was traveling towards the United States. Peter reacted quickly and found another eye-witness, William Grassley, and together they reported the incident to the Government House. (11) Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe supported their argument on the abolition of slavery and passed the 1793 Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada. (12) This act prevented any new slaves from entering the trade, and limited the servant contracts. It also allowed any slaves who were born into the trade after 1793 to be freed after their 25th birthday. Furthermore, every child that was born within the trade past this point would be free at birth. (14)

The damage that arose from this trade will serve as a great remark in history for the rest of our lives. As a result of the stories of bravery that were shared in this article, the author reaffirmed that racial features do not define the capability one holds to change the world. Contrary to popular belief, the ones who were once enslaved served as their own advocates for freedom.