

“Binding” through “Bondage”: Resistance, Cohesion, and Kinship in an Atlantic Perspective

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Historians credit the transatlantic slave trade with creating, structuring, and restructuring cultures and cultural practices throughout Africa, Europe, The Caribbean Islands, and Latin America. The African Diaspora within the early modern period was the largest forced migration of people from one continent to various others. Anthropologist J. Lorand Matory deemed this movement a “transnational” phenomenon, as Africans continued to move across the Atlantic throughout the early modern period and beyond.¹ Dealing with the African Diaspora specifically, scholars have calculated that from 1500 to 1800 CE, nearly four Africans crossed the Atlantic for every one European.² Since the emergence of studies tracing the African Diaspora, and the subsequent development of “Atlantic History” as a model to trace change over time and across continents, scholars continue to challenge and debate various aspects of slavery and cultural developments within both Africa and the Americas.

Various subjects within the transatlantic slave trade continue to be scrutinized by historians, particularly when exploring the African Diaspora within the Atlantic World. One subject, however, that remains relatively isolated from the Atlantic model is the notion of African family structures. The “slave family” continues to be placed in an isolated setting of one particular island, region, or a single plantation. In fact, it appears very few historians of the Atlantic attempt to chart African marriage practices or family units in the Americas beyond a

¹ J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Traditions, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

² Figures have ranged over the years since Philip Curtin released his seminal work *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). See also Patrick Manning *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 37; David Eltis et. al, eds., *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database* <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/essays-intro-01.faces>; David Eltis and David Richardson, *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008): 2.

single case study. Additionally, many of these analyses neglect to include West Africa as a point of origin for slaves and their descendents in the European colonies, which more or less strips the enslaved of their identities beyond servile status in the Americas. While the past scholarship is certainly valuable, the negligence toward a comparative historical analysis presents problems for Atlantic historians. As peoples of African descent throughout the world continue to see one another as sharing a “collective existence” through Pan-African and Afrocentric ideologies, it is necessary that historians investigate the differences and similarities among the diverse Atlantic slave societies of the early modern period.³

In the August 2009 *Journal of Southern History*, Anthony Kaye urged scholars of the U.S. south to push “past the boundaries of time and space that circumscribe antebellum slavery” by including comparative discussions of Latin American and Caribbean slave systems.⁴ Additionally, noted African Diaspora scholar Vincent Brown recently argued that “if scholars were to emphasize the efforts of the enslaved more than the condition of slavery, we might at least tell richer stories about how the endeavors of the weakest and most abject have at times reshaped the world.”⁵ This presentation responds to both Kaye and Brown’s directives; viewing how slaves throughout the Atlantic colonies countered the threats and actions aimed at undermining their families.

The following piece seeks to use historiographical, theoretical, and historical methods to provide some fundamental conclusions as to how scholars might tackle this complex issue. For instance, few scholars have attempted to “Atlanticize” slave kinship patterns. My use of the Atlantic paradigm argues that despite regional and cultural divergences throughout the Atlantic colonies, the enslaved made an effort to either utilize or recreate certain West African forms of kinship in the Atlantic colonies. Additionally, even when the option of recreation was unavailable, enslaved peoples throughout the Atlantic resisted the colonial systems in strikingly similar methods. Is it possible to find commonalities and similarities between the diverse mixtures of slaves held within culturally diverse societies throughout the Atlantic? The lack of

³ Yaw Owusu-Frempong, “Afrocentricity, the Aday Festival of the Akan, African American Festivals, and Intergenerational Communication,” *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 35: 6 (Jul., 2005): 732.

⁴ Anthony Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World,” *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. LXXV, No. 3 (August 2009): 627-650.

⁵ Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 114: 5 (Dec., 2009): 1249.

comparative analyses between different colonies prevents a historian from attaining a satisfactory answer. While certain scholars, such as Sarah Pearsall and Roquinaldo Ferreira, have charted how blood-related family units divided by the Atlantic regularly corresponded and successfully continued familial ties within the “Atlantic community,” slaves of African descent stripped away from their families in their home countries remain marginalized in family history.⁶

This paper’s objective is to use the term “Atlantic kinship” as a method of analysis to view how slaves of various ethnic identities shipped to diverse Atlantic colonies responded to the dehumanizing aspects of enslavement through understandings of kinship and community. First, it considers how family, marriage and kinship patterns among slaves can be understood by grounding these relations in African history. A relative commonality of cosmology among many slaves of African descent provided one area of cohesion for many of the enslaved. While it is true that pockets of Muslim and Catholic slaves were also taken to the Americas, scholars generally maintain that most Africans practiced a belief system dubbed “animist.”⁷ The second point invites scholars of these various fields to engage in a comparative approach toward the slave family and kinship practices in the Caribbean and mainland colonies. For the purposes of this present study, the emphasis is upon the elements of resistance practiced by Africans as they sought to recreate and/or maintain their unique cultural practices. Subjects such as the presence of polygynous marriages, nuclear families, African naming patterns, marronage, and the syncretic Afro-Indigenous American communities all provide important instances of Atlantic kinship. Thirdly, I chart change over time, specifically in the context of how emancipation affected black

⁶ Roquinaldo Ferreira, “Atlantic Microhistories: Mobility, Personal Ties, and Slaving in the Black Atlantic World (Angola and Brazil),” in *Cultures of the Lusophone Black Atlantic* edited by Nancy Priscilla Naro, Roger Sansi-Roca, and Dave Treece (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007): 106-109; Sarah Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); The term “Atlantic Community” was first coined by Robin Law and Kristin Mann in their work “West Africa in the Atlantic Community: the Case of the Slave Coast,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, vol. LVI, no. 2 (April, 1999): 307-331.

⁷ For scholarship on Catholicism in West-Central Africa, John Thornton has made the most assertive claims that many of the Angolans and Kongoleses were at least familiar, if not fully converted to, Portuguese Catholicism, see: John K. Thornton, “African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 96: 4 (Oct. 1991): 1101-1113. See also, Mark M. Smith, “Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion,” *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 67: 3 (Aug., 2001): 513-534. For scholarship on the Islamic presence among Africans taken in the slave trade, see: Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998): 59-87; Ali A. Mazrui, “Islam and the Black Diaspora: The Impact of Islamigration,” in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* edited by Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies and Ali A. Mazrui (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001): 346-349; Joao Jose Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

family and marriage patterns throughout the Atlantic World. To illustrate this phenomenon, I argue that the well-known North American slave marriage ritual “jumping the broom” exemplifies the continuous complexities emancipation imposed upon the black American family. Lastly, I review the literature written upon the Atlantic paradigm as an invitation to scholars who primarily focus on regional forms of Atlantic history to engage in dialogue with one another, in an effort to create a nuanced view of the Atlantic experience.

Within popular thought slavery remains an institution that stripped slaves of dignity, agency, and African heritage. While Africanists have recently answered the call to bring Africa back into the discussions of slave cultural development in the Americas, popular beliefs and Black Nationalist discourses continue to rehearse the idea that the slave system destroyed traditional forms of African familial structure.⁸ While certain slaveholders did harbor intentions to sabotage their slave’s familial integrity, it is a fallacy to assume that the enslaved did not resist their master’s encroachments, and use both passive and active tactics in order to maintain their dignity. One element commonly left out of many analyses of kinship and resistance within slave studies is how West African cultural understandings influenced slaves’ survival in an unfamiliar and oppressive situation.

In his 2005 work, *Recreating Africa*, James Sweet challenged “widely held notions that African slaves were unable to replicate specific African institutions in the Americas.”⁹ To borrow a phrase from Paul Lovejoy, Sweet’s work “places the Middle Passage in the *middle* of the slaves’ experiences,” while analyzing the slave trade as an event that begins in one or more locations of West/West Central Africa, continues aboard the slave ships, and lands in one of the various locations within the Atlantic World.¹⁰ Sweet follows the concept of “Africanization,” first coined by Gilberto Freyre in 1933, who argued for slaves’ cultural expressions in Brazil as representing a continuation of Africa in the Americas.¹¹ This approach should have been revolutionary, as it contrasted with the general assumption among many historians of US slavery

⁸ Shaka Saye Bambata Dolo, *Afrikan Marriage Versus Slave Marriage and the Destruction of the Black American Family Values* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2005).

⁹ James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 228.

¹⁰ Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 2.

¹¹ Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study of the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (1st published 1933; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946).

that slaves were products of their master's whim and became effectively "westernized" through the slave system.¹² The problem, however, was that Freyre's work was not translated into English until much later, and did not receive widespread exposure among North American scholars. Despite this lack of dissemination, certain contemporary anthropologists and sociologists were gaining notoriety for arguing an "African survivals" thesis, citing their own fieldwork as evidence that slaves throughout the Atlantic colonies retained an impressive amount of "Africanisms" in their culture, despite the supposed erasure of African memory.¹³ The most influential individual in the group was arguably American anthropologist Melville Herskovitz, whose monumental work *The Myth of the Negro Past* was pivotal in reversing the supposition that any remnants of African culture were eradicated through the slave system. While Herskovitz's work continues to influence successive generations of slave scholarship, historian Matt Childs has recently noted that Herskovitz and his contemporaries had a "tendency to regard African cultures as being 'transplanted' in their entirety and thus being a clear 'continuation' of African beliefs and practices."¹⁴ Some scholars felt Herskovitz had tendency to overemphasize his African survivals theory, and that a new paradigm needed to be developed.

The answer came in the form of the "creolization thesis" first proposed by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price in their work *The Birth of African-American Culture* published in 1976. Mintz and Price argued that any African "survivals" that existed within the slave societies of the Americas blended with the other cultures and ethnicities in their new environments, forming a creolized culture that combined elements from a myriad of ethnicities.¹⁵ The creolization pattern promoted innovations and change over time. Mintz and Price did not deny that African survivals existed, but felt that the previous thesis did not credit the slaves' abilities to adapt and respond to enslavement in an unfamiliar and oppressive condition. Additionally, Mintz and Price claimed

¹² Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918): 45; U. B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1929): 194, 195, 198; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956): viii, 340, 362.

¹³ Scholars include Nina Rodrigues, *Os Africanos no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1935); Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Havana: J. Montero, 1940); Melville Herskovitz, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1990, orig. 1941).

¹⁴ Matt Childs, "Slave Culture," Forthcoming in Trevor Burnard and Gad Human, eds., *The Routledge History of Slavery*, 2010: 171.

¹⁵ Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976). See also Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 39-40.

that the “random” nature of the slave trade grouped a myriad of West African ethnicities together, which would not be particularly conducive to stabilizing any one particular cultural trait within the New World. Mintz and Price’s theory continues to enjoy wide acclaim, but just as Herskovitz’s theory was challenged, Mintz and Price would face similar forms of scrutiny.

Africanists and other scholars in opposition to Mintz and Price often argue that one of the essential problems of the creolization paradigm is that it neglects to address changes that were occurring in West African societies that influenced slaves of African descent before they boarded the ships to embark in the Middle Passage. Authors like Sweet argue for an “Africanization” thesis, submitting that looking back to Africa provides nuanced conclusions as to how the fluidity of West and West Central Africans’ worldviews and cosmologies allowed them to adapt to changes both in Africa and abroad. Sweet is rather polite in his argument against Mintz and Price, as he still maintains that Mintz and Price’s work is “seminal.” Historian Sterling Stuckey, however, is less kind to Mintz and Price’s theory. A historian of slave culture in the US South, Stuckey asserts that “having published nothing of consequence on slave art or religion in North America, Mintz and his co-author Richard Price declare themselves experts on slave culture in this country.”¹⁶ Stuckey’s primary criticism revolves around how scholars who subscribe to the creolization thesis quickly dispose of the slave’s African origins and identity, neglecting to consider how the slaves likely viewed themselves. In 2005, J. Lorand Matory leveled a similar criticism, stating: “Diasporas are often studied as though time had stopped in the homeland.”¹⁷ Matory’s point is aptly taken. Since the societies of the West African coasts were rapidly changing during the early modern period of European expansion and slave trading, one might wonder if it is appropriate to suggest that the worldview of one West African taken into slavery in the first quarter of the 18th century was the same as one shipped across the Atlantic even fifty years later.

The creolization vs. Africanization debate has been one of the primary separators between scholars of North American slavery and those studying Latin America and Caribbean. The argument typically revolves around the volume of African-born slaves that were imported to

¹⁶ Sterling Stuckey, “Reflections on the Scholarship of African Origins and Influence in American Slavery,” *The Journal of African American History* Vol. 91: 4 (Autumn, 2006): 426.

¹⁷ J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 71.

the colonies. Certain Latin American and Caribbean colonies consistently imported massive amounts of enslaved Africans who held a clear numeric majority to the white colonists, while the North American societies' importations paled in comparison. Additionally, most North American slave systems also experienced surprisingly high occurrences of natural increase among their enslaved populations, while the sugar-based Iberian, French, and English colonies demanded frequent replenishment of their dying chattel.¹⁸ Thus, as the argument goes, the continued importation of large volumes of West Africans led to a constant renewal of "African" culture, while the US slaves accommodated much of their indigenous culture through avenues of religion, environment, and more pronounced exposure to "white" culture.

Africanists such as John Thornton, Linda Heywood, T. J. Desch Obi and others are actively addressing such issues, arguing that West and West Central Africans were active contributors to the cultural and economic development throughout the Atlantic World, while simultaneously viewing how events occurring in these regions of West Africa were shaping the Atlantic World's development.¹⁹ What then, did kinship, family, and marriage mean to West and West Central Africans between the periods of 1444-1888 CE? Social Scientists have engaged this important question for quite some time. The main problems with many of the earliest investigations, particularly those conducted in the early twentieth century, is that the white observers were decidedly Eurocentric, seeking to contrast the primitive, pagan African with the refined, Christian European.²⁰ In 1950, however, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Ford released an important edited work titled *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, a comprehensive work that traced various examples of African family, kinship, and marriage patterns, particularly in contrast to the Anglo-European models. Radcliffe-Brown and Forde defined a system of kinship

¹⁸ Historian Michael Tadman illustrates this phenomenon through a case study of Louisiana's sugar producing economies. His findings suggest that even though Louisiana is a "North American" slave system, its reliance on sugar production led to it mirroring sugar producing slave systems elsewhere. Michael Tadman, "The Demographic Cost of Sugar: Debates on Slave Societies and Natural Increase in the Americas," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 105: 5 (Dec., 2000): 1534-1575.

¹⁹ John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Linda M Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); T. J. Desch-Obi, *Fighting For Honor: The History of African Martial Arts in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008);

²⁰ The reader is referenced to a few choice examples: Arthur Ffoulkes, "Fanti Marriage Customs," *Journal of the Royal African Society* Vol. 8: 29 (Oct., 1908): 31-48; E. G. S. Parrinder, "Christian Marriage in French West Africa," *Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 17: 4 (Oct., 1947): 260-268.

and marriage simply as “an arrangement which enables persons to live together and co-operate with one another in an orderly social life.”²¹ Despite their rather simple definition of a complex issue, both the editors and their contributing authors do not stray from discussing the variegated practices of kinship and marriage among the numerous ethnicities throughout the African continent. Moreover, Radcliffe-Brown and Forde argue that “all the kinship systems of the world are the product of social evolution. An essential feature of evolution is diversification by divergent development...for a kinship system to exist, or to continue in existence, it must ‘work’ with at least some measure of effectiveness.”²² The concepts of “divergent development” and “social evolution” have interesting implications when discussing how kinship communities formed during the transatlantic slave trade.

One question that bedevils social scientists of all disciplines is what connotes “traditional” and “authentic” practices. Anthropologist Barbara Harrell-Bond argues that “such concepts as tradition and modernity are often dichotomized as though elements of tradition do not persist in modern society or the potential for modernity and change does not exist in the so-called traditional societies.”²³ All customs, traditions, and practices are prone to evolve when placed in different environments. When peoples of West African descent were enslaved and transported to the various Atlantic colonies, the kinship structures they knew in West Africa were forced to adapt to their new environments. Some scholars have interpreted this experience as destroying “African” structures of family and kinship, arguing that enslavement did not allow a facilitation of traditional African ideals and cosmologies.²⁴ Such an assertion, however, simplifies the issue, as scholars contend that early modern West and West Central African theology and ritual were incredibly fluid, particularly in contrast to the Western European cultures that were dictated by the written word (with exception to certain enslaved West African Muslims who were literate).²⁵ The appeal to oral tradition, as opposed to written law, allowed

²¹ E. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Darryl Forde, ed., *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950): 3.

²² Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, “Introduction,” in *African Systems*, 82-83.

²³ Barbara E. Harrell-Bond, “Stereotypes of Western and African Patterns of Marriage and Family Life,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* Vol. 38: 2 (May, 1976): 388.

²⁴ E. Franklin Frazier, “The Negro Slave Family,” *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 15: 2 (Apr., 1930): 198-259. Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918).

²⁵ Philip D. Curtin, “Ayuba Suleiman Diallo of Bondu: Introduction,” in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* edited by Philip D. Curtin (Long Grove: Waveland Press, Inc., 1967/1997):

many West Africans to more easily adapt to the difficult conditions they faced in the Atlantic colonies. Thus, while I agree with the need to find “African survivals,” as proposed in the mid-twentieth century by anthropologist Melville Herskovitz, I am hesitant to accept the contention that “recreating” Africa in the New World required specific African cultural norms to exist within the enslaved communities. Indeed, in some ways I agree with David Evans that the very phrase “African survival” is problematic, as the term seems to suggest that “the African quality is something left over from the historical past that really ought not to exist but has somehow avoided extinction.”²⁶ I also argue that if a traditionally African practice is discontinued under the Atlantic slave system, it does not necessarily mean that African traditions were decimated within Atlantic slavery, or even that the new Afro-diasporic society cannot still be appropriately dubbed “African.”²⁷ The scholastic tendency to polarize slave systems within the United States, Caribbean, and Latin America as either fitting a “creolized” or “Africanized” pattern of development overlooks the most important component within the system: the slave. While economic, political, and demographic histories provide fascinating insights into the development of New World slave systems, attention must be placed upon the slaves themselves, as evidence shows that no matter which system a slave was taken to, freedom and thoughts of “home” remained a high priority. Thus, beginning in Africa is one key to understanding families of African descent in the Atlantic World, even if West Africa and its Diaspora do not appear similar on the surface.

Kinship was arguably the most important component of many West African groups’ societal structures. Christina Snyder argues that within both Native American and many African societies, “the opposite of slavery was not freedom: the opposite of slavery was kinship.”²⁸ So important was this concept of kinship that one particular group known as the Kabre of northern

17-59; Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves: The True Story of an African Prince Sold into Slavery in the American South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986): 8; Sylviane Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

²⁶ David Evans, “The Reinterpretation of African Musical Instruments in the United States,” in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* edited by Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 380.

²⁷ For the concept of “African” cultures in the Western Hemisphere, a new generation of scholars are now using the term “neo-African” to describe communities like Haiti, or religious rituals such as Santeria or Vodou. See Carole Elizabeth Boyce Davies, *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture, Three Volumes* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008): 446, 740.

²⁸ Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 5

Togo became notorious among Europeans for selling their kin in exchange for cowrie shells. Charles Piot explains that it was “specifically a child’s mother’s brother – that family member generally regarded as the closest and most affectionate – who sold his sister’s children as slaves.”²⁹ Piot found that the memory of these events are still admitted, and in some ways embraced, by the modern Kabre community. The strength of this avuncular system placed power in the hands of the uncle, who could sell his nephew despite the potential contestation of the father. Such extreme cases were certainly experienced by only a minority of the eleven million slaves shipped across the Atlantic, but this example demonstrates the importance attached to kinship communities that existed along the western coastline of Africa. Considering the importance placed on kinship in West African societies, it is fair to suggest that slaves taken across the Atlantic sought to recreate kinship communities to survive these institutions of enslavement.

Scholars must be careful to distinguish “kinship” and “family” within African studies. While the two terms are similar, Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone argue that the notion of family within African societies is a difficult topic to assess, considering that the ideas surrounding “family” life and structure are culturally and etymologically European.³⁰ Despite the apparent difficulties associated with finding “authentic African families” and kinship structures, Marks and Rathbone’s contention does make the case that Americanists studying slavery or peoples of African descent in the Americas can no longer afford to be ignorant of African cultures.

The 1983 issue of the *Journal of African History* was dedicated solely to the family in Africa, and included an important article by Anne Hilton tracing the experience of the slave family in the Kongo and Zaire during the tumultuous period of Portuguese expansion in Central Africa. She expounded upon the evolving conception of family and kinship in the Kingdom of Kongo, and how the influx of slaves and Europeans contributed to this change. Kongo went from being controlled by exogamous matrilineal groups to patrilineal descent, and then eventually

²⁹ Charles Piot, “Of Slaves and the Gift: Kabre Sale of Kin During the Era of the Slave trade,” *Journal of African History* Vol. 37: 1 (1996): 31.

³⁰ Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, “The History of the Family in Africa: Introduction,” *The Journal of African History* Vol. 24: 2 (1983): 145-161.

reverting back to the matrilineal model.³¹ Hilton's article explains the important social evolution taking place among African societies involved in both European expansion and Atlantic trade. In 1988, David Parkin and David Nyamwaya argued that African notions of marriage, gender, and family units changed during European-African contact, and shaped how Africans defined themselves and others.³²

As stated before, it is quite difficult to generalize "African religion" into one single description. It is possible, however, to find commonalities between West Africans who practiced a form of religion generally known as "animism."³³ The religious institutions of West Africa, excepting the regions that allowed conversion to Islam and Catholicism prior to the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade, have a few primary similarities that differentiated them from the Christian European institution. Anthropologist Mary Kingsley stated that the West African religious institution "has so firm a grasp on his [the African's] mind that it influences everything he does. It is not a thing apart, as the religion of the European is at times."³⁴ Other Africanists have made a similar point.³⁵ For many West Africans, religious and secular life was not mutually exclusive. Speaking of the Akans of West Africa, John Pobee argued that the Akan believed they were "surrounded by hosts of spirit beings, some good, some evil, which can and do influence the life of mortals for good or for ill... The distinction between the sacred and the secular is not neatly drawn."³⁶ West African belief systems encompassed nearly every element of West African livelihood, including kinship and marriage patterns.

In general, West African "traditional" religions were polytheistic and based upon homage to one's ancestors.³⁷ Additionally, these belief systems were adaptable, having the ability to adopt the positive traits of other belief systems with which they came in contact, forming hybrid religions. For example, West Africans would not find it unusual to blend elements of

³¹ Anne Hilton, "Family and Kinship among the Kongo South of the Zaire River from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 24: 2 (1983): 189-206.

³² David Parkin and David Nyamwaya, eds. *Transformations of African Marriage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

³³ For a thorough description of Animism and its historical usage see: Caroline Rooney, *African Literature, Animism, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

³⁴ Mary Henrietta Kingsley, *West African Studies* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901): 393.

³⁵ Joseph Alexander Tillinghast, *The Negro in Africa and America* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902): 46-59.

³⁶ John Pobee, "Aspects of African Traditional Religion," *Sociological Analysis* Vol. 37: 1 (Spring, 1976): 18.

³⁷ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): 11, 43.

Catholicism within their hierarchy of gods, as happened in Haiti, nor was it strange to hang charms and “fetishes” next to a Christian cross, as found in the Afro-Brazilian community of Palmares.³⁸ Even today on the Senegambian coast, one finds a distinct group of Muslims called the Baye Faal, who subscribe to a syncretism of Islamic and Rastafarian ideologies.³⁹ West Africans believed that if a specific deity offered them assistance in their daily life, then that deity deserved to be recognized. Such beliefs had particular implications when West Africans were taken into slavery. One account in antebellum Louisiana even attests that some slaves did actually worship the devil, because they believed Jesus had never offered them any assistance in their enslavement. The African American abolitionist William Wells Brown provides an example of one slave’s prayer to the devil:

"Now, good and lovely devil, for more than twenty years, I have served you faithfully. Before I got into your service, de white folks bought an' sold me an' my old wife an' chillen, an' whip me, and half starve me. Dey did treat me mighty bad, dat you knows. Den I use to pray to de Lord, but dat did no good, kase de white folks don't fear de Lord. But dey fears you, an' ever since I got into your service, I is able to do as I please."⁴⁰

This particular slave named Dinkie was a practitioner of Louisiana Vodou, which blended traditional African religious elements, such as charms and fetishes, with the Christian notion of two opposing forces for good or evil: God and the Devil. Slaves like Dinkie found that belief in God resulted in enslavement and oppression, whereas worship of the devil provided autonomy and resistance. The rest of Brown’s account suggests that the other slaves on the plantation did not subscribe to Vodou as extremely as Dinkie did, but does assert that Dinkie’s master, his overseer, and his fellow slaves recognized his power and saw him as inspiring figure of resistance to enslavement.

Syncretisms like Vodou were formed from the cultural and religious exchanges between Africans and Europeans. These connections arguably began as soon as Europeans began sailing the coast of West Africa in the mid-15th century. The fluidity of West/West Central African

³⁸ Mary Karasch, “Zumbi of Palmares: Challenging the Portuguese Colonial Order,” in *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America* edited by Kenneth J. Andrien (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, Inc., 2002): 111-112.

³⁹ Neil J. Savishinsky, “The Baye Faal of Senegambia: Muslim Rasta in a Promised Land?” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 64: 2 (1994): 211-219; Neil J. Savishinsky, “Rastafari in the Promised Land: The Spread of a Jamaican Socio-religious Movement among the Youth of West Africa,” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Dec., 1994), pp. 19-50.

⁴⁰ William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home: or, The South and its People* (Boston: A. G. Brown & Co., 1880): 74.

religion leads James Sweet to assert that “many Africans...believed that the creator [supreme ancestor] could be transformed in accordance with political, economic, or social change.”⁴¹ As European nations increased their contact with various West African kingdoms, these polities adapted and changed in accordance with their new circumstances. Since the spiritual was connected to the secular, new circumstances demanded that the previous system be adjusted to meet the needs of the society. Kinship, marriage, and family structures were included in this equation. Slaves of African descent in the New World would have to redefine family life and matrimonial practices. While some might see this occurrence as “destroying” traditional African livelihood, I argue that the alteration of West or West Central African family structure or marriage ceremonies was something slaves of African descent were prepared to do, and that this did not conflict with their indigenous worldviews. Thus, one could argue that the slaves taken along the rapidly changing West African coastline were already prepared to alter their cosmologies prior to the transatlantic journey.⁴² As Africans from various regions of West and West Central Africa met for the first time, either on the coast of West Africa, the slave ship, or one of the Atlantic slave societies, their religious systems as well as their understandings of kinship were important components for surviving enslavement in the New World.

An increasing number of scholars are now viewing one location that directly correlates to the development of African kinship communities throughout the Atlantic World: the Middle Passage. In her work on language and Diaspora, Sophia Lehman asserts that while slaves were “torn from different geographic areas and different cultures, the common point of origin for the slaves was this oceanic crossing.”⁴³ The setting of the Middle Passage was so horrendous that even if one survived physically, the memory of cramped and unsanitary conditions likely held a lasting impact for many of the slaves who landed within one of the Atlantic colonies. Olaudah Equiano’s account described the experience as such: “Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the

⁴¹ Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 107.

⁴² For an interesting analysis of how “traditional” West African religions were fluid and constantly changing see: John S. Pobee and Emmanuel H. Mends, “Social Change and African Traditional Religion,” *Sociological Analysis* Vol. 38: 1 (Spring, 1977): 1-12.

⁴³ Sophia Lehman, “In Search of a Mother Tongue: Locating Home in Diaspora,” *MELUS* Vol. 23: 4 (Winter, 1998): 105.

stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many.”⁴⁴ Equiano’s description suggests that the physical conditions of the slave ship were enough to kill a captive physically, but another section of his account describes a beating one captive took after a failed suicide attempt. Equiano explains that the flogging was issued because the captive preferred “death to slavery.”⁴⁵ The preference of death over slavery reveals the difficult conditions slaves experienced while traversing the Atlantic, and that while some captives did not die physically, they died mentally and emotionally.

Considering that violence was central to the slave trade, it is not surprising that white slavers had constant anxiety about the potential for organized rebellion within the Middle Passage. Emma Christopher explains that the need “for security against such revolts was why slave ships recruited numbers of sailors far outweighing the needs of the ship.”⁴⁶ While a few revolts, such as the well-known *Amistad* insurrection, were successful, the majority of these insurrections were relatively futile in their perceived goal: sailing back to West Africa to avoid enslavement in the Americas.⁴⁷ Besides insurrection, slaves utilized kinship formation as a passive method of resistance in surviving the conditions of the Middle Passage, which directly prepared them for surviving the hostile and unfamiliar settings of the Atlantic slave societies. Slaves housed within the slave ships of the Middle Passage consisted of a diverse group of ethnicities holding different languages, beliefs and cultural customs. The Middle Passage has been described as a “zone of forgetting, a zone of erasure of the African being and self.”⁴⁸ While this is a correct assertion of how the conditions were geared to break the slave’s spirit, an equally important analysis is found in how kinship facilitated support and survival upon the slave ships. In his monumental novel *Roots*, African American novelist Alex Haley attempted to illustrate how this process may have transpired, as slaves had to overcome linguistic differences in order to communicate:

⁴⁴ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, Written by Himself. Vol. I* (London, 1745): 82-83.

⁴⁵ Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 82.

⁴⁶ Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (New York: Cambridge university Press, 2006): 182.

⁴⁷ Eric Robert Taylor, *If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ ‘Biodun J. Ogundayo, “Folklore,” in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage*, edited by Toyin Falola and Amanda Warnock (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007): 175.

Words not understood were whispered from mouth to ear along the shelves until someone who knew more than one tongue would send back their meanings. In the process, all of the men along each shelf learned new words in tongues they had not spoken before...Muttering among themselves for hours, the men developed a deepening sense of intrigue and of brotherhood. Though they were of different villages and tribes, the feeling grew that they were not from different peoples or places.⁴⁹

For Haley, kinship building was a process that ultimately assisted the African captives in developing bonds that broke through ethnic distinctions or rivalries.

While Haley's description works well as an illustration of how this process *may* have occurred, historians and other social scientists have difficulty when presenting evidence that attests to kinship formation while aboard the slave ship. The primary problem lies in a lack of primary sources, particularly those written by West Africans. Fortunately, a number of scholars are particularly creative in their analyses. The bonds developed on the slave ship were most clearly expressed in the communities developed after they landed in the designated colony. Stephanie Smallwood's pivotal work *Saltwater Slavery* argues "that Africans throughout the Americas accorded the highest possible regard to those whom they designated as 'shipmates' - and articulated the meaning of that relationship in the idiom of kinship."⁵⁰ James Sweet reveals that slaves aboard the Middle Passage did develop terms of association with each other: "Friendships were made, alliances were forged, and new networks of kin were constructed, even as these Africans were making the dreadful crossing of the Atlantic...enslaved shipmates called one another *malungo*, a term that in Brazil came to be understood as "comrade," "relative," or perhaps "brother."⁵¹ Walter Hawthorne released an important study tracking the bonding experience of shipmates aboard the *Emilia*, which crash landed on the Brazilian coast. Even after a number of years, Hawthorne was able to find that the shipmates remained close to one another, and that the community developed upon the slave ship was able to continue in a foreign

⁴⁹ Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of An American Family* (New York: Doubleday, 1976): 218.

⁵⁰ Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 196; Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants Across the Eighteenth Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 33. See also Desch-Obi, *Fighting for Honor*, 153.

environment.⁵² Additionally, Latin Americanists Russell Lohse and Herman Bennett found the same evidence for Costa Rica and Mexico, furthering the idea that slaves reacted to this forced migration to differing colonies in remarkably similar ways.⁵³

Genevieve Fabre takes her analysis one step further, arguing that the “Slave ship dance,” a form of exercise forced upon slaves by the white crewmen, represented both a moment of bonding for the enslaved participants *and* a continuation of “African” culture. Fabre analyzes the primary sources to argue that the slave ship dance was directly responsible in preparing the enslaved to form kinship communities upon arrival in the New World:

The dance was a symbolic enactment of a whole system of beliefs, reinforcing worship rites and calling forth the gods, or the dead, or supernatural forces that could perhaps counteract white schemes...Beliefs associated with death, and the attitudes they engendered, accompanied the slaves through their journey and their New World odyssey...The African heritage was thus very much present on the slave ship.⁵⁴

The slaves transformed a forced imposition into a moment to both recreate and develop a memory of Africa. The slave ship dance represents the idea that while the master class possessed legal control over a slave’s body, the slaves still controlled their minds. In Fabre’s own words: “even if control were exerted, the imagination is free.”⁵⁵ The slave ship was an incredibly brutal form of transportation, for both crewmen and captives alike, but it was also an opportunity for slaves to form communities of “fictive kin” that would continue beyond the boundaries of the slave ship.⁵⁶ The development of fictive kin provided psychological healing from the loss of blood relatives left behind on the West African coastline, while simultaneously preparing those captives that survived the Middle Passage to develop similar communities in the hostile Atlantic slave societies.

⁵² Walter Hawthorne, “Being now, as it were, one family,” Shipmate Bonding on the Slave vessel Emilia, in Rio de Janeiro and throughout the Atlantic World,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* Vol. 45: 1 (2008): 53-77.

⁵³ Russell Lohse, “Africans in a Colony of Creoles: The Yoruba in Colonial Costa Rica,” in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* edited by Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004): 134, 143; Herman Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003): 118.

⁵⁴ Genevieve Fabre, “The Slave Ship Dance,” in *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* edited by Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Carl Pedersen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 38-39.

⁵⁵ Fabre, “Slave Ship Dance,” 44.

⁵⁶ Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007):303-307.

In the 1970s, scholarship concerning the slave family increased significantly. While some scholars had written on the slave family prior to the 1970s, much of the research suggested that the slave family was a shattered institution controlled by the master class. Much of the scholarship followed the lead of Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who proposed the thesis that enslavement forced black families to become matrifocal; a circumstance he believed held resonance into the twentieth century.⁵⁷ One of the most controversial figures to follow Frazier's matrifocal model was Daniel P. Moynihan, author of *The Negro Family in America: a Case for National Action*, more popularly known as the "Moynihan Report."⁵⁸ Moynihan proposed that the matrifocal structure of the slave family psychologically damaged black males, and was the primary reason they could not function as authority figures in contemporary society. Even notable historians such as Kenneth Stampp and Stanley Elkins both proposed that slave families were incomplete institutions. Stampp asserted that the "slave woman was first a full-time worker for her owner, and only incidentally a wife, mother, and homemaker."⁵⁹ Thus, the scholarship considering slave families was not particularly conducive to finding "African survivals."

The 1970s witnessed a significant shift in how scholars perceived enslaved families in the Americas. Scholars comprising Americanists, Caribbeanists, and Latin Americanists all sought to respond to the demeaning image placed upon the enslaved family of the early modern period and sought to destroy the myth that slave families were meaningless and unimportant institutions. Their findings provided evidence that many slaves were able to form stable nuclear families while enslaved. While the main agenda of the scholarship was to dignify the reputation of the slave family, they also found cases where African familial survivals were present. One of the most noteworthy, and perhaps surprising, examples was in some slaves' continued practice of polygyny in the colonies.

Prior to examining this feature of African family structure, it should be noted that polygyny was typically only practiced by the elite class in West African societies. Other West African families typically formed what Westerners call the "nuclear family." Despite this,

⁵⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

⁵⁸ Daniel P. Moynihan *The Negro Family in America: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1965).

⁵⁹ Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956). See also: Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

Europeans and their American descendents still believed that polygyny and promiscuity were innate tendencies of African peoples. In the fall of 1865, a few months after North American slaves were freed through the Civil War, one democratic newspaper argued that if ex-slaves were granted suffrage a wide diffusion of polygynous practice would soon commence, and that many of the former slaves would readily convert to Mormonism, since it was an expanding American religion that tolerated the marriage of one man to multiple women.⁶⁰ Despite this myth, Patrick Mason recently argued that during the southern anti-polygamy campaigns of the late 19th century, “African Americans generally expressed similar moral disgust with polygamy.”⁶¹ While Mason’s assertion has credibility, there is evidence within certain locations of the Atlantic World that some slaves did openly practice polygyny. Polygyny was a social practice that was legally acceptable in West African societies, one which these slaves of African descent would not have perceived as “promiscuous” or unorthodox, compared to the European Christians who condemned the practice as infidelity.

Caribbeanist Barry Higman became one of the most prolific scholars to study the slave family, primarily using quantitative data from locations throughout Jamaica. In his first article, Higman used the Old Montpelier, New Montpelier, and Shettlewood Jamaican plantations as his initial case studies. Higman found that contrary to popular belief, these plantations revealed that the nuclear family unit was the majority, and that the only matriarchal structure that existed was the continuance of a West African practice in which the son and his bride would stay within close proximity to the matriarch after marriage.⁶² Higman did, however, partially revise his earlier conclusions; arguing that slave families must be viewed in relation to the location that they were enslaved, as urban environments held different circumstances compared to rural environments.⁶³ Despite this caveat, Higman found instances of polygynous marriage among males, suggesting that slaves were able to recreate certain African familial functions within these

⁶⁰ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1976): 297.

⁶¹ Patrick Q. Mason, “Opposition to Polygamy in the Postbellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 76: 3 (Aug., 2010): 544.

⁶² B.W. Higman, “Household Structure and Fertility on Jamaican Slave Plantations: A Nineteenth Century Example,” *Population Studies*, Vol. 27: 3 (Nov., 1973): 543-544.

⁶³ B. W. Higman, “African and Creole Slave Family Patterns in Trinidad,” *Journal of Family History* No.3 (1978): 163-178; B. W. Higman, “The Slave Family and Household in the British West Indies, 1800-1834,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 6: 2 (Autumn, 1975): 261-287.

locations in Jamaica.⁶⁴ Additionally, an underutilized study by Richard Dunn also found that two Virginia plantations have recorded evidence of polygamists residing on their grounds.⁶⁵ Since the evidence comes from the plantation records, it suggests that the master both knew about, and tolerated the practice of polygyny among his slaves. Outside of the Anglo-Atlantic World, evidence also suggests that polygyny received widespread acceptance in Atlantic societies holding autonomous black majorities, such as the independent republic of Haiti. High ranking leaders of the Afro-Brazilian Palmares quilombo were eligible to take multiple wives due to their status in the community.⁶⁶

Within a decade of Higman's pivotal study, myriad scholars of North America, the Caribbean and Latin America contributed new theses regarding how slave families functioned throughout various Atlantic slave societies.⁶⁷ Most of them used case studies to argue that slave families were far more stable than previously expected. Within much of the Bahamas, for example, Michael Craton argued that "slaves largely determined their own family arrangements."⁶⁸ Social historian Herbert Gutman was the most prolific scholar of the slave family in the United States, arguing that slaves in both colonial and antebellum America held far more agency than previous scholars had credited them. While his study focused on North America, Gutman was largely responsible for initiating an interest in reinterpreting slave family scholarship in multiple areas throughout the Atlantic, as the *Journal of African History* released a special issue in 1983 exploring African marital and family patterns, quoting a speech in which Gutman encouraged scholars to continue looking for Africanisms in American slave family patterns.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Higman, "Household Structure," 539.

⁶⁵ Richard Dunn, "A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life at Mesopotamia in Jamaica and Mount Airy in Virginia, 1799 to 1828," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 34: 1 (Jan., 1977): 50.

⁶⁶ Cecile Accilien, *Rethinking Marriage in Francophone Africa and Caribbean Literatures* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008): 90. Karasch, "Zumbi," 111.

⁶⁷ David L. Chandler, "Family bonds and the bondman: The Slave Family in Colonial Columbia," *Latin American Research Review* Vol. 16: 2 (1981): 107-131; Richard Graham, "Slave Families on a Rural Estate in Colonial Brazil," *The Journal of Social History*, Vol. 10: 3 (Spring, 1976): 382-402; John Stuart MacDonald and Leatrice D. MacDonald, "Transformation of African and Indian Family Traditions in the Southern Caribbean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 15: 2 (March, 1973): 171-198.

⁶⁸ Michael Craton, "Changing Patterns of Slave Families in the British West Indies," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 10: 1 (Summer, 1979): 1-35.

⁶⁹ Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone, "The History of the Family in Africa: Introduction," *The journal of African History* Vol. 24: 2 (1983): 145-161.

One Africanism commonly cited is the use of “day-names” among slaves throughout the various colonies. Scholars have been able to find that in locations where a black majority existed, African family and kinship survivals were more prevalent, particularly in regards to naming systems. The majority of scholarship on slave naming patterns considers the Anglophone Atlantic, with historians John K. Thornton, Cheryll Ann Cody, Charles Joyner, David DeCamp, Jerome S. Handler, and JoAnn Jacoby releasing some of the most well-known studies.⁷⁰ While it is beyond the scope of this study to review all of these aforementioned works, their premises are similar: slaves of West and West Central African descent were able to replicate their indigenous naming patterns throughout the Anglophone Atlantic for a surprisingly long time. Other useful studies of such “West Africanisms” are found in studies of maroon communities throughout the Americas, such as the Black Seminoles of Florida, or the Saramaka “Bush Negroes” of Suriname.⁷¹ These communities, because of their isolation, were able to reproduce elements of West African naming patterns. Despite the scholarship produced thus far, John Thornton still maintains that “there are many barely touched records of African names in Africa... Africanists...are encouraged to expand their studies to include such records for this fine but important point of African culture, and Americanists should similarly pursue investigations of New World survivals and adaptations.”⁷² Thus, it appears much work remains on this important, but understudied element of West African kinship and family survivals in the Atlantic World.

African kinship groups provided psychological opposition to enslavement throughout the Atlantic colonies. Enslaved Africans’ used a variety of methods to resist the institution. Some slaves used violence and rebellion.⁷³ Direct physical confrontations, however, were statistically

⁷⁰ John Thornton, “Central African Names and African-American Naming Patterns,” *William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 50: 4 (Oct., 1993): 727-742; Cheryll Ann Cody, “There Was No Absalom on the Ball Plantations: Slave Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720-1865,” *American Historical Review* Vol. 42 (1987): 563-596; Cheryll Ann Cody, “Naming, Kinship, and Estate Dispersal: Notes on Slave Family Life on a South Carolina Plantation, 1786 to 1833,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 39: 1 (Jan., 1982): 192-211; Charles Joyner, *Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 217-222; David DeCamp, “African Day-Names in Jamaica,” *Language* Vol. 43: 1 (Mar., 1967): 139-149; Jerome S. Handler and JoAnn Jacoby, “Slave Names and Naming in Barbados, 1650-1830,” *William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 43 (1996): 692-697.

⁷¹ Rebecca B. Bateman, “Naming Patterns in Black Seminole Ethnogenesis,” *Ethnohistory* Vol. 49: 2 (Spring, 2002): 227-257; Richard Price and Sally Price, “Saramaka Onomastics: An Afro-American Naming System,” *Ethnology* Vol. 11: 4 (Oct., 1972): 341-367.

⁷² Thornton, “Central African Names,” 742.

⁷³ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside an Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990): 75-76; Eugene D. Genovese, “Husbands and Fathers, Wives and Mothers, During Slavery” in *Family Life in America, 1620-2000* edited by Mel Albin and Dominick Cavallo (St. James: Revisionary Press, 1981): 238; Venture

unsuccessful, as white militias and lawmen were appropriately equipped to deal with insurrections or threats of violence. In a similar vein to the experience of the Middle Passage, the enslaved had to find a different route of “rebellion.” In his pivotal work, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, Herbert Aptheker argued that slaves used more efficient tactics such as “sabotage, shamming illness, ‘stealing,’ suicide...self-mutilation...strikes” and poison.⁷⁴ Scholars dub such actions as “passive resistance.” Indeed, a slave named James Curry provides one case in point. When his master forbade him to marry a free woman of color, Curry openly disregards the order and marries the woman of his choice. When his master threatens to “cut his throat from ear to ear,” Curry remained undaunted, claiming: “I knew he would not kill me, because I was money to him, I knew I could run away if he punished me.”⁷⁵ Curry provides one example of how family and marriage provided an avenue outside of the dehumanizing experience of enslavement, and provided an efficient form of opposition that did not require violence. These notions of kinship, family, and marriage, however, continue to be ignored in discussions of the resistance employed by slaves throughout the Atlantic. As noted earlier, kinship and family were key aspects for many slaves seeking to find meaning in an unfamiliar and oppressive situation. Thus, slaves were “binding through bondage” and developing a group of kinsmen dubbed “fictive kin.” These fictive kin provided a familiar notion of family left behind in West Africa.

Numerous examples of slave resistance exist throughout the Atlantic World, but one of the most pervasive, existing in nearly every Atlantic colony, was the occurrence of marronage. Maroon communities were one of the most prevalent examples of fictive kin development that provided both physical and mental resistance to enslavement. The development of fictive kin began rather early for West Africans. Ever prior to the Middle Passage, maroon groups formed among escaped slaves along the West African coastlines to prevent being taken across the Atlantic.⁷⁶ Monica Schuler submitted that it is nearly “impossible, at least for the eighteenth

Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself* (New London: C. Holt at the Bee Office, 1798): 19 docsouth.unc.edu/neh/venture/menu.html; Craton, “West Indian Slave Families,” 17; T.J. Desch-Obi, *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Arts in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008): 115.

⁷⁴ Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers Company, 1978): 140-149.

⁷⁵ “Narrative of James Curry,” in *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* edited by John W. Blassingame (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977): 139.

⁷⁶ Ismail Rashid, “Escape, Revolt, and Marronage in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Sierra Leone Hinterland,” *Canadian journal of African Studies* Vol. 34: 3 (2000): 656-683.

century, to speak of slave rebellions without acknowledging the influence of maroons.”⁷⁷

Maroon communities were based off of an understanding of kinship between its members and resistance toward the oppressive institution of slavery, a resistance that included both passive and active methods. Instances of group-based resistance continued upon the slave ship and into the Atlantic colonies. Certain communities were based on ethnic identity, such as the Akan maroons of Jamaica, the Mandinga community of Mexico, or the Bantu speaking “Bush Negroes” of Suriname.⁷⁸ Other organized rebellions also demonstrate a collection of similar ethnicities, as John K. Thornton and Mark Smith have both demonstrated that the slaves involved in the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina manifested strong links to Congolese/Angolan heritage through religious conviction, ceremony, and fighting techniques.⁷⁹

Recently, however, Marcus Linebaugh and Peter Reideker proposed that many of these early “marooned” communities throughout the Atlantic were interracial, viewing kinship beyond regional or ethnic identity, and into a group of individuals locked in a common struggle.⁸⁰ Such a notion is also seen in the controversial plot of Denmark Vesey, a Caribbean born slave brought to the United States around the time of the Haitian Revolution. Vesey was accused of proposing a Pan-African conception of rebellion and believed that Africans held certain “inter-cultural connections.”⁸¹ Such ideas promote that Africans utilized kinship while enslaved throughout the Atlantic. This early “Pan-African” idea provided an opportunity to extend family and kinship connections to other disenfranchised groups throughout the Atlantic, most specifically American Indians.

While the experiences of Africans and American Indians differ on many levels in American history, they hold a common heritage of white oppression, subjugation, and color-based prejudice. Evidence attests that American Indians, like their West African counterparts,

⁷⁷ Monica Schuler, “Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 3: 4 (Summer, 1970): 377.

⁷⁸ For the Jamaica and Suriname references see Schuler, “Ethnic Slave Rebellions in the Caribbean and the Guianas,” For the Mandinga community see: Patrick J. Carroll, “Mandinga: The Evolution of a Mexican Runaway Slave Community, 1735-1827,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 19: 4 (Oct., 1977): 488-505.

⁷⁹ John K. Thornton, “African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 96: 4 (Oct. 1991): 1101-1113. Mark M. Smith, “Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion,” *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 67: 3 (Aug., 2001): 513-534.

⁸⁰ Marcus Linebaugh and Peter Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000): 126.

⁸¹ Walter C. Rucker, “‘I Will Gather All Nations’: Resistance, Culture, and Pan-African Collaboration in Denmark Vesey’s South Carolina,” *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 86: 2 (Spring, 2001): 135.

also frequently utilized familial and kinship based resistance to repel European aggression. For instance, Powhatan established an incredible kin base throughout Virginia through marriages to multiple women, and then marrying off his daughters to both powerful Indian allies *and* Englishmen, causing the English to view him as harboring “male power and prestige.”⁸² In Brazil, prophets and local Indian leaders frequently employed the return to Indian family and kinship practices as their rhetoric of resistance. One such leader implored his brethren not to go with the Jesuits, because they “would prohibit them from having many wives...to have their dances and customs of their ancestors... [or] live in their Indian ways.”⁸³ In the Northern United States, James Axtell demonstrates that American Indians raided European settled villages to replace fallen kinsmen. For example, if an uncle in a particular family was killed by European violence, the tribe would replace the uncle with a European of similar age by special ceremony. One such captive, James Smith recounted that his Indian “father” reminded him that “you are now flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones. By the ceremony that was performed this day, every drop of white blood was washed out of your veins.”⁸⁴ Thus, it appears that the adoption was more literal than symbolic, even to the extent that Thomas Peart, a twenty three year old Pennsylvanian, recollected that his new family was rather cold toward him, because they “did not hold [his predecessor] in high esteem.”⁸⁵ Christina Snyder found similar occurrences in the Southeastern United States as the Spanish and British vied for colonial supremacy.⁸⁶ In many cases, evidence suggests that European captives preferred the Indian community to their previous one, causing a growing rate of Europeans to “go native.” The event of going native was also prevalent throughout Latin America, but to date I do not believe anyone has illustrated why as vividly as North American scholars.

Within the Atlantic World, both American Indians and African slaves faced European encroachment against their way of life, so in many ways this fostered a natural union between the two cultures, particularly regarding family and kinship structures. One might recall groups such as the Black Seminoles in Florida, the Afro-Indian Redbones of South Carolina, and the

⁸² Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 59.

⁸³ Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005): 251.

⁸⁴ James Axtell, “The White Indians of Colonial America,” in *Family Life in America*, Albin and Cavallo: 24.

⁸⁵ Axtell, “White Indians,” 24.

⁸⁶ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*.

Mosquito Indians of Central America alongside the numerous cases of intermarriage and community building that occurred throughout the Atlantic.⁸⁷ In some cases, African runaways to Indian villages transitioned fairly easily, because many American Indian societies held familiar kinship beliefs with West Africans. In one study, Barbara Krauthamer demonstrates that runaway slave women in Georgia were frequently welcomed into Creek society and kin communities: “when they entered Creek towns, black women found local societies compatible with the communities left behind in West Africa.”⁸⁸ In multiple ways, American Indian kinship provided African slaves with an additional defense against the demeaning institution of slavery in an unfamiliar country. Thus, marronage and Afro-Indian syncretism provided important elements of resistance to enslavement found throughout the Atlantic

While marronage is a fascinating topic of analysis, one wonders what the remaining majority of slaves did to resist the dehumanizing effects of enslavement. Since only a minority of slaves were successful in forming maroon communities, other slaves needed to develop methods of resistance that were able to escape the master’s suspicions. Some scholars are now arguing that marriage and family formation provided an effective means to dealing with the harsh reality of enslavement. Rebecca Fraser recently released an important work tracking slave families in Antebellum North Carolina using the history of emotion as a methodology. An important focus of Fraser’s work analyzed the practice of courting, which oftentimes involved eluding slave patrols, or even disobeying a master’s refusal to marry, in order for the enslaved man to offer romantic gestures to the woman he desired most.⁸⁹ Historian Kevin Dawson found that slaves with adept swimming skills used rivers and creeks to secretly visit their spouses, and were able

⁸⁷ For US see: Kevin Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Edward Bryan Reuter, *The American Race Problem* 2nd Edition (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966): 126. For Latin America see: Alida C. Metcalf, “Millenarian Slaves? The Santidade de Jaguaripe and Slave Resistance in the Americas,” *American Historical Review* Vol. 104: 5 (Dec. 1999): 1531-1560. Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-betweens and Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005). Roger Bastide, *African Civilizations in the New World* translated by Peter Green (New York: Harper and Row, 1971): 46-47. Recently Jack D. Forbes provided a more Atlantic perspective in his *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

⁸⁸ Barbara Krauthamer, “Kinship and Freedom: Fugitive Slave Women’s Incorporation into Creek Society,” in *New Studies in the History of American Slavery* edited by Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006): 161.

⁸⁹ Rebecca J. Fraser, *Courtship and Love Among the Enslaved in North Carolina* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009): 32-87.

to evade repercussions from slave patrollers who usually could not swim.⁹⁰ A Jamaican planter proposed that slaves be allowed to marry on the same plantations for the simple fact that “a Negro man will run after his wife to the other end of the island and be back the next morning to his work,” which the planter maintained was bad for the slave’s health.⁹¹ Larry Hudson, Jr. argues that slaves’ organization into productive families units provided one way “to balance the power of the master.”⁹² In a recent work, Frances Smith Foster argues that “the literature shows that if Antebellum African Americans had the right to choose their mates, they judged it a privilege worth protecting.”⁹³ Indeed, slaves of both sexes in the Antebellum South fought, pleaded, or threatened suicide if separated from their mates, which had both positive and negative consequences.

The important point to consider, however, is not to judge what connotes successful resistance, but more so that slaves were not passive victims always conceding to the master’s whim. Unfortunately, it is difficult to provide similar conclusions within the slave societies of Latin America and the Caribbean. Obviously slaves in Francophone, Lusophone, and Hispanophone colonies held great reverence for family life, but the great divide between the North American slave experience and other Atlantic colonies is that liberated slaves in Antebellum North America were able to dictate and publish their experiences to bolster the abolitionist cause. Within the Spanish, French, and Portuguese colonies, however, an equivalent practice did not exist. North America seems relatively unique in its sheer volume of slave narratives, as Barry Higman relates that even within English controlled colonies such as Jamaica, no slave narratives are available to study.⁹⁴ Despite a dearth of first hand testimonials, numerous Caribbeanists and Latin Americanists have used both quantitative and qualitative forms of data to argue that many slaves formed strongly knit communities and stable nuclear families.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Kevin Dawson, *Enslaved Watermen in the Atlantic World, 1444-1888* (Ph.D Dissertation: University of South Carolina, 2005): 46.

⁹¹ Quoted in Higman, “The Slave Family and Household in the British West Indies”, 270.

⁹² Larry E. Hudson, Jr., *To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997): 31.

⁹³ Frances Smith Foster, *Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in Early African America* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2010): 36.

⁹⁴ Barry Higman, “Terms for Kin in the British West Indian Slave Community: Differing Perceptions of Masters and Slaves,” in *Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America* edited by Raymond T. Smith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984): 61-62.

⁹⁵ Humphrey E. Lamur, “The Slave Family in Colonial 19th-Century Suriname,” *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 23: 3 (Mar., 1993): 371-381; Christopher Lutz, *Santiago De Guatemala, 1541-1773: City, Caste and Colonial Experience*

Suffice it to say that throughout the Atlantic World slaves of African descent expressed genuine concern about their familial integrity, and actively sought to form healthy family units, despite the difficulties that enslavement presented. One particularly well-known ritual among African Americans illustrates this point particularly well.

The recent revival of the marriage ritual known as “jumping the broom” within African American communities continues to mystify folklorists and historians who attempt to chart the origins of the ritual. Despite the popular assertion that jumping the broom is African in origin, more careful scholars have proven that the ritual has origins within the working class population of the British Isles, but no analysis has yet explained why it became a “near universal” form of marriage among slaves in the antebellum south.⁹⁶ Its transference from Celtic Europe into Antebellum African America is beyond the scope of this analysis. The more important question involves what it represented to the slaves who used it to seal their matrimony. Southern accounts differ on the ritual’s precise meaning among the enslaved population. Most commonly, the narratives of ex-slaves interviewed by the Federal Writer’s Project in the early twentieth century found it to be a degrading practice that the master imposed upon them, particularly since their marriages were not legally recognized. Some ex-slaves even denied that the practice ever existed. One particularly revealing interview was with two ex-slaves named John and his wife Laney. When they were both asked about slave marriages, Laney quickly interjected and described her understanding of slave weddings: “My mother said they used to make up a new

(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); Paul Lokken, “Marriage as Slave Emancipation in Seventeenth-Century Rural Guatemala,” *The Americas*, Vol. 58: 2 (Oct., 2001): 178; Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); David M. Stark, “Discovering the Invisible Puerto Rican Slave Family: Demographic Evidence from the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Family History* Vol. 21: 4 (Oct., 1996): 395-418; Lawrence Brown and Tara Inniss, “The Slave Family in the Transition to Freedom: Barbados, 1834-1841,” *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 26: 2 (August, 2005): 257-269.

⁹⁶ Charles Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1999): 51-53. For its European origins see: Alan Dundes, “Jumping the Broom”: On the Origin and Meaning of an African American Wedding Custom” *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 109, no. 433 (Summer, 1996): 327; C.W. Sullivan III “Jumping the Broom”: A Further Consideration of the Origins of an African American Wedding Custom” *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 110, No. 436 (Spring, 1997): 203. For the African arguments see: Gerald David Janes ed., *Encyclopedia of African American Society*, Vol. 2 (Newbury Park: Sage Publications Inc., 2005): 876; John F. Baker, *The Washingtons of Wessington Plantation: Stories of my Family’s Journey to Freedom* (New York: Atria Publishing, 2009): 93; Joyce A. Ladner, “Teenage Pregnancy: The Implications for Black Americans,” in *The State of Black America* edited by James D. Williams (New York: National Urban League Inc., 1986): 66; Laurie Calkhoven, *Harriet Tubman: Leading the Way To Freedom* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 2008): 42; Tolagbe Ogunleye, *The African Roots of Jumping the Broom* (Philadelphia: Cowrie Publishing Co., 2004); Danita Roundtree Green, *Broom Jumping: A Celebration of Love. A Complete Guide to Keeping Traditions Alive in your Family* (Richmond: Entertaining Ideas Ltd, 1992): 3.

broom and when the couple jumped over it, they was married.” At this point John promptly interrupts: “Laney, that was never confirmed. It was just hearsay, as far as you know, and I wouldn’t tell things like that.”⁹⁷

On the contrary, other accounts reveal the slaves’ ingenuities in tailoring a rather simple ceremony into a meaningful matrimonial practice. One story related by a southern white woman relates how some slaves internalized the ritual into their own culture:

My mother lived in the South when a little girl during the Civil War. I have often heard her tell when the colored folks got married the man would lay the broom down on the floor with the bushy end to the north, then he would take the girl by the hand, then they step over the broom, then backward again. Then the girl picked up the broom, laying it down again with the bushy end to the south, then the girl took the man by the hand and they step over it and backward again, to keep evil away and bad spirits through their life. Mother said many a night she would steal down and watch when she heard some of the colored folks were going to get married.⁹⁸

This description by a white female author describes the ritual as a far more empowering ceremony than the testimonies of the ex-slaves. In this instance, the enslaved couple blended African spirituality with the simplicity of broom jumping, which legitimized the marriage among the enslaved, and allowed them a certain dignity typically not allotted to them by the master. The slaves described in this passage utilized a more methodical, ritualistic, and symbolic ceremony than the simple “jump and go” testimony described by many of the ex-slave narratives.

As slaves gained their freedom throughout the United States, the evidence from ex-slave narratives suggests that jumping the broom dwindled in popularity. The primary reason for this lies in the fact that ex-slaves were now eligible for legally recognized marriages under ordained Christian ministers. Ex-slaves seeking to gain acceptance into a segregated and overtly racist North American society attempted to shun any practice associated with enslavement, and many of them found jumping the broom an embarrassing remnant of slave culture. Indeed, even whites

⁹⁷ Georgia WPA Narratives, Vol. 4 Part 4, p. 84. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=044/mesn044.db&recNum=87&tempFile=./temp/~ammem_cRKr&filecode=mesn&next_filecode=mesn&prev_filecode=mesn&itemnum=8&ndocs=100

⁹⁸ Harry Middleton Hyatt, *Folklore from Adams County, Illinois* 2nd ed. (New York: Alma Egan Hyatt Foundation, 1965): 465.

associated jumping the broom with black inferiority, as it was consistently reenacted for white audiences in minstrelsy.⁹⁹ Ex-slave Rena Raines recalled that during slavery her mother and father married by jumping the broom, but asserted that her “mother an’ father come ter Raleigh [North Carolina] atter de surrender an wus married right.”¹⁰⁰ Raines assertion suggests that the further African Americans drifted from the antebellum period, the more “wrong” jumping the broom became as a valid marriage ceremony in popular memory. Thus, jumping the broom as a marriage ceremony was publicly shunned by many African Americans, and laid to rest for over one hundred years. Interestingly, its revival was produced by one of the most popular movements initiated throughout the African Diaspora.

The revival of the broom jumping tradition among African-American couples primarily stems from the popularity of Alex Haley’s novel *Roots*, in which the main character Kunta Kinte and his wife Bell jump the broom when they decide to marry.¹⁰¹ Haley’s novel (and the even more widely influential television series that reached tens of millions of Americans in 1977) initiated a cultural phenomenon among black Americans. It seems more than coincidental that heritage novels and how-to manuals concerning the centrality of broom jumping in African-American wedding traditions filled the shelves after *Roots* skyrocketed to popularity. Additionally, the African-American interest in Pan-Africanism became most pronounced in the black power movements of the 1960’s, and continued into the 1980’s through a variety of factors. Benji J. O. Anosike credits this interest with the “military triumphs of the Africans in Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe over their white colonizers, the on-going militico-political activities surrounding white-controlled South Africa...and the ramifications of the publication of Alex Haley’s *Roots*.”¹⁰² Anosike’s reference to *Roots* is of special importance, as this is one piece of literature that had a direct effect on African American society at large. It seems more

⁹⁹ Robert C. Toll, From Folktype to Stereotype: Images of slaves in Antebellum Minstrelsy,” *Indiana University Press* Vol. 8, no. 1 (Jun., 1971): 41.

¹⁰⁰ North Carolina Narratives, Vol. XI, Part 2. Narrative of Rena Raines, p. 195. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=112/mesn112.db&recNum=198&tempFile=/temp/~ammem_F6qB&filecode=mesn&next_filecode=mesn&itemnum=1&ndocs=100

¹⁰¹ Haley, *Roots*

¹⁰² Benji J. O. Anosike, “Africa and Afro-Americans: The Bases for Greater Understanding and Solidarity,” *The Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn, 1982): 435.

than coincidental that jumping the broom was revived shortly after *Roots* was published and most especially after the hugely popular television miniseries displayed the practice visually.¹⁰³

As jumping the broom became integrated into modern African American “heritage weddings” in the 1980s, the way African Americans “remembered” the practice shifted. Instead of being identified as the demoralizing practice associated with slavery, many African American authors portrayed the practice as something inherently African; a belief that even remains well into the twenty first century. In contrast to the denial by the aforementioned John who corrected his wife Laney’s “presumption,” or the assertion by Rena Raines that jumping the broom was not a valid marriage, African Americans in the 1980s and beyond have jumped the broom both in memory of their enslaved ancestors *and* to commemorate their African heritage. Thus, recreating memory and an identification with “Africa” was crucial to a large scale revival of the formerly discarded practice.

When the ritual was revived, another interesting case of movement took place within North America; jumping the broom expanded beyond the US South. As *Roots* was carried to bookstores and television sets across the country, African Americans were influenced by the ideology behind it. In a similar fashion to the broomstick wedding’s movement throughout the US South through a Diaspora of “acculturated creole” slaves, jumping the broom has been disseminated through popular culture and its association with heritage. In some respects, it has been resurrected as a “Pan-African American” phenomenon, with evidence of broom jumping occurring throughout every region of the United States.¹⁰⁴ The implications of this trend, however, go beyond just North America.

The continued Diaspora of African Americans has recently caused broomstick weddings to move in the opposite direction in the Atlantic. Jamaicans, Barbadians, and the Bahamans have

¹⁰³ Alan Dundes, ““Jumping the Broom”: On the Origin and Meaning of an African American Wedding Custom” *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 109, no. 433 (Summer, 1996): 327. For discussion of the television series see: Halford H. Fairchild, Russell Stockard and Philip Bowman. “Impact of Roots: Evidence from the National Survey of Black Americans,” *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 16, no. 3 (March 1986): 307-318. Lauren R. Tucker and Hemant Shah, *Race and the Transformation of Culture: The Making of the Television Miniseries Roots*, Critical Studies in Mass Communication 9 (1992): . Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, Joel W. Grube and Milton Rokeach, “Roots: The Next Generation- Who Watched and With What Effect?” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 45 No. 1 (Spring 1981): 58-68 Ruth A. Protinsky and Terry M. Wildman, “Roots: Reflections From the Classroom,” *The Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 48, No. 2 (Spring 1979): 171-181.

¹⁰⁴ One evidence of this is the re-release of Harriet Cole’s work *Jumping the Broom: The African American Wedding Planner* in 2004, demonstrating that it continues to influence African American couples in the 21st century.

taken the broomstick wedding and applied it to their own cultural understandings and economic uses. Interestingly, all three of these islands are tourist destinations, revealing that African American tourism has influenced how the Afro-Caribbean tourism industry has catered to the tastes of other Afro-diasporic communities. Many Caribbean hotel brochures offer a “broomstick ceremony,” which usually includes a “broom mistress” who officiates the ceremony by emphasizing the African and slave identities of the participants, alongside the durability of the African spirit through their retention of culture. Additionally, these African American heritage weddings in the Afro-Caribbean have also induced a trend among islanders to utilize the broomstick wedding in their marriage rituals, even though there is no documented evidence of the practice being associated with Caribbean slavery.¹⁰⁵

One of the most recent and interesting examples is the union of Afro-British boxer Lennox Lewis and his wife Jamaican wife Violet Chang. The couple married in Jamaica and included jumping the broom as part of the ceremony.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, in other Jamaican marriages covered by newspapers such as the Jamaica Daily Gleaner, jumping the broom is referred to as an “African custom,” demonstrating that its introduction within this community was through the identification of African heritage.¹⁰⁷ Such instances demonstrate the importance of how the Atlantic World continues to function as a base for cultural exchange, economic productivity, and how various Diasporas continue to influence the world around them. Additionally, the commonality of heritage perceived by peoples of African descent throughout the world has contributed to empowering Africa and its Diaspora. The homage paid to the “motherland” by peoples of African descent continues clear into the twenty first century, and has developed a notion of kinship that presently exists throughout the diverse afro-diasporic communities. At the beckoning of historians David Brion Davis and Peter Kolchin, scholars of

¹⁰⁵ The website www.weddingsinjamaica.com clearly reveals the effect that tourism has upon Jamaican wedding ceremonies. One of the websites advertisements states “As Jamaica attracts bridal couples from all over the world, we are providing some additional choices of ceremonies to accommodate our many bridal couples.” One such ceremony is a “broom jumping” ceremony, see http://www.weddingsinjamaica.com/broom_jumping.html. The effect that such marriages have had on Native Jamaicans is revealed in an article written by Faith Smith, in which she poses a question “In what sense are Caribbean residents who “jump the broom” in “Afrocentric” ceremonies in the Caribbean distinct from African American tourists who do the same thing when they visit the region to get married?” Such a reference demonstrates that the tourism industry seems to have affected Jamaican understandings of a common identity with African Americans. See Faith Smith, ““Your Know You’re West Indian if...”: Codes of Authenticity in Colin Channer’s *Waiting in Vain*,” *Small Axe* 10 (Sept., 2001): 43.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.lovetripper.com/bridalstars/wedding-database/lennox-lewis.html>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20060820/social/social1.html>

slavery have used comparative history to track similarities and differences between different slave systems, but these comparative studies remain a stark minority.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the importance of Atlantic history in transatlantic kinship studies is that it tracks the similarities and differences among Africans in a historical context, revealing how diverse peoples of African descent dealt with forms of enslavement and perhaps established an early precedent for these modern forms of Pan-Africanism and fictive kinship to develop throughout the global African Diaspora.

It has been four years since Alison Games submitted that Atlantic histories will be generated “by historians who work deliberately to integrate their particular findings into a larger unit, who read broadly, who are open to interdisciplinary approaches, and who are committed to moving beyond parochial frameworks dictated by conventional historiographic divisions.”¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, Jorge Canizares-Esguerra dedicated a chapter of his book *Puritan Conquistadors* to the divides that prevent the integration of historians of North America and those of Central/South America, while also providing potential solutions to the quandary.¹¹⁰ Such separations can be traced back to 1947 when Frank Tannenbaum first proposed what is now popularly known as the “Tannenbaum thesis,” which essentially argued that Catholicism and the Iberian legal codes instituted a “milder form” of servitude compared to its Anglo counterpart.¹¹¹ His assertion initiated a vigorous debate, with some scholars using case studies to argue that Tannenbaum was in fact correct in this assessment, while opposing scholars employ similar tactics to conclude that at the end of the day, slavery is slavery no matter where it existed.¹¹² In many ways, this led to a

¹⁰⁸ David Brion Davis, “Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 105: 2 (Apr., 2000): 452-466; Peter Kolchin, “The big Picture: A Comment on David Brion Davis’s ‘Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives,’” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 105: 2 (Apr., 2000): 467-471; Peter Kolchin, “In Defense of Servitude: American Pro-Slavery and Russian Proserfdom Arguments, 1760-1860,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 85: 4 (Oct., 1980): 809-827; Peter Kolchin, “Comparing American History,” *Reviews in American History* Vol. 10: 4 (Dec., 1982): 64-81; William McKee Evans, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the Sons of Ham,” *American Historical Review* Vol. 85: 1 (Feb., 1980): 15-43; Dylan C. Penningroth, “The Claims of Slaves and Ex-Slaves to Family and Property: A Transatlantic Comparison,” *American Historical Review* Vol. 112: 4 (Oct., 2007): 1039-1069; ¹⁰⁸ Damian Alan Pargas, “Boundaries and Opportunities: Comparing Slave Family Formation in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Family History* Vol. 33:3 (July, 2008): 316-345; Dunn, “A Tale of Two Plantations,” 32-65; David Brion Davis, “A Review of the Conflicting Theories of the Slave Family,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* No. 16 (Summer, 1997): 100-103.

¹⁰⁹ Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *American Historical Review* Vol. (June, 2006): 757.

¹¹⁰ Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): 215-233.

¹¹¹ Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946): 42-45.

¹¹² Notable supporters of the Tannenbaum thesis include: Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959): 225-226; Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Cuba and Virginia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Eugene

great divergence in slave studies, as many scholars continue to view the systems as representing opposing experiences.¹¹³

Hoping to respond to this vast historiography, this presentation argued that the similarities of slave's actions within these different societies represent the importance of family and kin among slaves throughout the Atlantic World, and that despite the legislative, cultural, and religious differences that existed within these various societies, slaves used similar methods to resist European encroachments toward their family and kin communities. Tannenbaum is correct in submitting that the Iberian legal codes (at least on paper) provided more opportunities for slave manumission, and thus might be properly categorized as "less harsh," but it is equally important to note that simply viewing the legal formalities of these colonies overlooks one crucial fact: West Africans did not want to be enslaved no matter which system they were allocated, and that despite the legislative, religious, and cultural divergences in these various societies, there are commonalities in their reactions to enslavement that are too crucial to ignore. In essence, one might maintain that perhaps it is now time to speak of an "Atlantic experience," and how it represents the experiences of slaves beyond just regional or national histories. Doubtless, regional histories hold a great deal of importance and should continue to be produced, but Atlantic history provides the opportunity for scholars to view these diverse societies in comparative context and unveil the Atlantic cultures that developed across African and European ethnic, racial, regional, and geographic boundaries.

Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976): 179; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). For noteworthy works opposed to the thesis see: David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966): 223-290; Marvin Harris, *Patterns of Race in the Americas* (New York: Walker and Company, 1964); David C. Rankin, "The Tannenbaum Thesis Reconsidered: Slavery and Race Relations in Antebellum Louisiana," *Southern Studies* 18:1 (Spring 1979): 5-31; Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999): 221.

¹¹³ Alejandro De La Fuente, "From Slaves to Citizens? Tannenbaum and the Debates on Slavery, Emancipation and Race Relations in Latin America," *International Labor and Working Class History* Vol. 77 (2010): 154.