

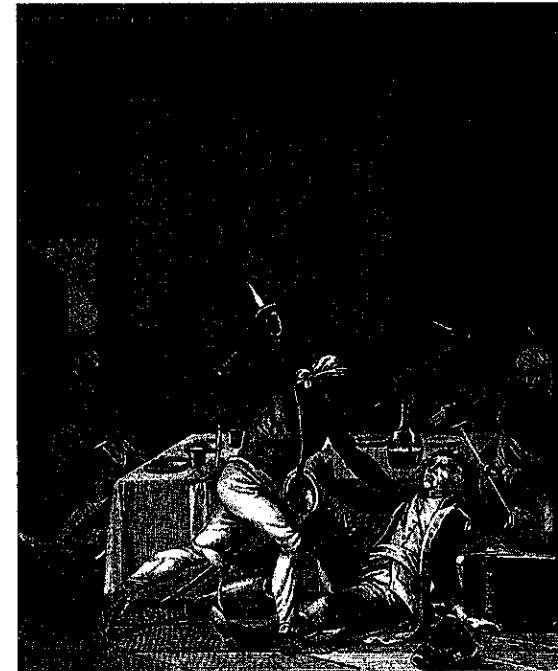
EACH IS CALL THAT 'CAUSE HE BORN IN THAT PARTICULAR
PLACE. BUT YOU'LL BECOME A NEGRO LIKE ME AND ALL THE
REST IN THE STATES AN ALL OVER THE WORLD, 'CAUSE IT AINT
HAVE NOTHING TO DO WHERE YOU BORN. 'TIS WHAT YOU IS, A
DIFFERENT KIND O' CREATURE". ()

The rights of the negro and of the native existed in a dialectical contradiction with the rights of man--the rights of the whites, the rights of the settlers. To the extent that these latter were men, the former were not. As Sartre wrote in his introduction to Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth:

"Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives." ()

The men asserted their being, founding it on the non-being of the natives. The negro, as slave, having fought this absolute negation in one particular stage of struggle, as native now served in the vanguard of a new struggle by right of prior experience in degradation and resistance. This new struggle's that of the world's natives, the wretched of the earth, to reclaim their disputed humanity. The rights of the natives to manhood implies imperatively the negation of the rights of some men to super-manhood.

Slave Revolts *as the earliest form of labor struggle*



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"The slave did not sell his labour power to the slave owner, any more than the ~~x~~ sells his labour to the farmer. The slave, together with his labour power, was sold to his owner once and for all. He is a commodity that can pass from the hand of one owner to that of another. He himself is a commodity but his labour power is not his commodity." ()

Slave revolts were therefore the logical form of struggle--as the strike and the formation of trade unions were the logical forms of struggle for free wage labor. To kill the owner of the slaves' labor power was the only way in which to regain ownership of that labor power. In the case of free wage-labor, surplus value was extracted indirectly; in the case of the plantation proletariat, the extraction of surplus value was carried out by means of direct coercive methods. The first form called for the trade union struggle, the second form called for the direct application of a counterforce. Fogel and Engelman's analysis does much to clarify this aspect. They point out that the

"...conditions under which labour was elicited from slaves did not correspond to the conditions under which labour was elicited from free men." ()

Also they write:

"In general, the labour of free men could only be elicited through wage bargains. However ownership of the human capital of blacks carried with it the right to use force to obtain labour. Ownership of the title to a slave gave a master the right to use whatever force was necessary-- including such force as might eventuate death--to compel his chattel to engage in the normal work routine. From the master's viewpoint, the advantage of force when judiciously applied, was that it produced desired behavior, in certain realms of activity, at a lower cost than would have been

about the Negro people. It aint so in the States... There they simply say the Negroes...and sometimes this nigger or that nigger an so on.... 'Tis tremendous difference... One single word makes a tremendous difference, that's why you can never be too sure what a word will do. I'm a nigger or a Negro an all o' us put together is niggers or Negroes. There aint no man an there aint no people. Just "nigger" an "Negro". An' little as that seem 'tis a tremendous difference. It makes a tremendous difference not to the whites but to the blacks. 'Tis the blacks who get affected by leaving out that word man or people. That's how we learn the race. 'Tis what a word can do. Now there aint a black man in all America who won't get up and say I'm a negro an I'm proud of it.... I'm going to fight for the rights of the Negro and I'll die fighting. That's what any black man in the States will say. HE AINT GOT NO TIME TO THINK 'BOUT THE RIGHTS OF MAN OR PEOPLE OR WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE TO CALL IT. IT'S THE RIGHTS OF THE NEGRO 'CAUSE WE HAVE GONE ON USING THE WORD THE OTHERS USE FOR US, AND NOW WE'RE A DIFFERENT KIND O' CREATURE. BUT WE GOT TO SEE FIRST AND FOREMOST 'BOUT THE RIGHTS O' THE NEGRO 'CAUSE ITS LIKE ANY KIND OF CREATURE TO SEE 'BOUT ITSELF FIRST. IF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND THE RIGHTS OF THE NEGRO HUS THE SAME SAID THING, 'TWOULD BE DIFFERENT BUT THEY AINT 'CAUSE WE'EE A DIFFERENT KIND O' CREATURE. THAT'S WHAT A SIMPLE LITTLE WORD CAN DO, AN 'TIS WHAT YOU GOING TO LEARN SOONER OR LATER. YOU'LL HEAR 'BOUT THE ENGLISHMAN AND THE FRENCHMAN, AN THE AMERICAN WHICH MEAN MAN OF AMERICA. AND

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With Emancipation, which in Jamaica came in 1838, ~~the scope~~ ^{hastened by} of the '31 rebellion had ~~hastened the process~~ ^{hastened the process}, the first part of the labor struggle had been won: the right of labor to own its labor power, and, in the context of Jamaica, to become native rather than slave labor. Labor which had been formerly exploited under the slave variant of labor power would now be exploited under the form of native labor.

If by the transplantation and reinvention of a culture the "negro" had reaffirmed himself as indigenous to his new reality, a new native in a new world, still in economic terms as either slave or native, he continued to be the object of superexploitation. He was still dehumanized by the superordinate system in order that his labor could be devalued and super-exploited. But behind him now was a tradition of struggle, and cultural imperatives born out of the recent struggle. So ~~that same~~ ^{the} struggle continued, although articulated in different terms. The black experience in the New World was to be, from its inception until the present moment, imperatively, centrally revolutionary. The indigenous tradition which the black created and which created him was a tradition of total revolution against the entire system which denied him those rights of manhood which it claimed for all others. The rights of man trumpeted on the Continent existed in a dialectic with the non-rights of the non-man, the negro, the native. Indeed the existence of the negro/native became the method by which the white/settler affirmed his own being. The negro/native was not in order that he (the white/settler) might be. The nothing of the negro confirmed the being of the settler. ()

In George Lamming's classic novel, In the Castle of My Skin, the Barbadian emigrant Trumper, returned from America to his native village, explains to his boyhood friend G.:

"Sometimes here [in Barbados] the whites talk

achieved through financial inducements..." ()

That is to say, the crucifixion of Fortune and Kingston was supremely rational as were all such punishments. One century later, in the 1860's in the United States, the terror punishments of slaves, such as this case quoted by C.L.R. James, served the same rational purpose--the continued extraction of surplus value:

"The negro was tied to a tree and whipped with switches. When Souther became fatigued with the labour of whipping he called upon a Negro man of his and made him 'cob' Sam with a single. He also made a Negro woman of his help to "cob" him. And after "cobbing" and whipping, he applied fire to the body of his slave, about his back, belly and private parts. He then caused him to be washed down with hot water in which pods of red ^{pepper} had been steeped. The Negro was also tied to a log, and to the bed post, with ropes, which choked him, and he was kicked and stamped upon by Souther. This sort of punishment was continued and repeated until the Negro died under its affliction." ()

The use of various methods of crucifixion was not an anomaly, nor an aberration, but central to the operation of the most efficient means of commercial agriculture know at the time--the use of the slave gang system. As Fogel and Engleman prove, the use of the right amount of force to insure maximum efficiency was a carefully calculated and rational form of capitalist enterprise.

"Force was not an incidental feature of slavery. Without force the alienability of the title to the human capital of blacks

would have been worthless; at least in so far as it affected the plantation's capacity to produce. For it was only by applying force that it was possible to get blacks to accept gang labour without having to pay a premium that was in excess of the gains from economies of scale. The validity of this contention is demonstrated by the experience of the immediate post-emancipation period. After the slaves were freed many planters attempted to reconstruct their work gangs on the basis of wage payments. But such attempts generally foundered despite the fact that wages offered to freedmen exceeded the incomes they had received as slaves by more than 100 percent. Even at this premium planters found it impossible to maintain the gang system once they were deprived of the right to apply force." ()

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The use of force was as institutionalized a part of the system as was the use of free wage bargains. And the struggle against it as necessary a response as the trade union movement. Yet it has been a part of the general mystification inseparable from the black experience in the New World, that slave revolts, the plantation form of labor struggle, have not been interpreted as such. This mystification, as we shall later see when we examine the numerous erroneous theses vis-à-vis the black presence in the New World, is central to the ideological interpretation which relegated the black struggle to a marginal role in New World history.

This cannot be too much insisted upon. Once this fact is grasped then slave revolts appear as what they in fact were--the earliest form of sustained labor struggle against the hegemony of capitalism in the New World. Slave revolts, like slave-created culture, constitute a central part of the long tradition of labor struggle on the North American continent. The implications

wage labor-power. As I wrote elsewhere:

"The tradition of the revolt of labour began early in Jamaica.... The slave was determined to deny, to negate, his status as merchandise. With every revolt, every escape he was claiming that his labour power was his property and not his master's ... Until Emancipation the basic issue at stake was a man's right to his own labour; and therefore, within the value system of the society, to his right as a man." ()

The last great slave revolt in Jamaica in 1831 bears this out. It was led by a literate house slave and Baptist Deacon, Daddy Sam Sharpe, who, after the failure of the revolt and his capture, told a missionary that part of his plan had involved mass passive resistance. When the cane reaping was due to start after Christmas, the slaves had planned to sit down and to refuse to work until their masters paid them wages. Afraid that the masters would have killed and tortured some to terrorize the others into working, they had organized a military regiment of some 150 men with fifty guns. Passive resistance would, in the instance of slavery, have to be backed up by armed force because of the planters' accustomed and systematic resort to violence.

A recent historian puts it accurately when she says, "The movement he [i.e., Sharpe] organized did not aim to establish a new world but to make specific and limited changes in Jamaican society; the slaves were to establish their right to sell their labour for wages." ()

The stratagems used differed with the individuals, and the journeys varied as did the roads followed. A promised land and a chance to make a new life as a free man were always the goals, even though sometimes the realization fell short of the expectation. The memoirs of the quasting slaves were felt by many readers of the nineteenth century to epitomize the condition of man on the earth, since it documented the personal history of the individual to whom bondage was real and freedom was more than a dream." ()

In the Civil War, the slaves' fight for the ownership of their labor power coincided with the larger conflict against black ~~masters~~, one colonel declared that, "it would have been madness to attempt with the bravest white troops what he successfully accomplished with the blacks." () As C.L.R. James concludes;

*Not a quote
by MLK*

"The whites were not fighting for freedom." () for the ownership of their labour power. They already had that. The civil war was for the black the culmination of a tradition of struggle, a tradition at once peculiar to them and their situation: and centrally significant as the most extreme and sustained tradition of labour struggle in the New World. ()

The forms of revolt in Jamaica changed too. In 1831 a slave rebellion broke out in which the weapon of the strike was used in an attempt to force the masters to replace the use of slave-labor power with that of

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of this are far reaching.

It means that the tradition of labor militancy in the United States began with the blacks and that the white proletariat, if it is to validate its existence as proletariat rather than as "white," must be able to see its own struggles in every slave revolt. It must assume its own history, as distinct from the history of the bourgeoisie. For, as we hope to develop later, the double consciousness of which Dubois spoke is not confined to blacks. For whites, it constitutes the main cause of the ambivalence in the American identity.

This problem is not confined to America. In Cuba the black Marxist, Walterio Carbonnel, was put in a work camp because he insisted on the black revolutionary contribution as the earliest example of the revolutionary tradition in Cuba. He pointed out the need for the psyche of the white Cuban to assume this history, this tradition, if the social, political, and economic revolution were to be matched by a cultural one. In orthodox Marxism, as interpreted in Cuba, this line was seen as divisive, as dangerous to the solidarity of the masses. Fernando Retamar, a poet and cultural official, was later to write his perceptive and important article "Caliban," in which, using allusive terminology, he in effect supported Carbonnel, arguing that revolutionary Cubans should all assume the identity of Shakespeare's Caliban as against that of Prospero. (In Cas de Las Americas, No. 68, Sept.-Oct. 1971, pp. 124-151.)

place in fiction

While the colonial nature of the Caribbean plantations has been noted, its capitalist nature has been disguised by the erroneous conception of the plantation system as a system based on a slave mode of production. This mode of production is then differentiated from the capitalist mode of production and conceptualized as pre-capitalist. Eugene Genoves, the historian of the South and of slavery in particular, has persisted in this interpretation. Yet as we have shown, the plantation was central to the capitalist system.

It did not compete against capitalism but was a unit of it in the same way as the factory. The peasant growing cash crops for the market on his small acreage constituted another unit. The modes of labor control, the forms of the extraction of surplus value are different, but all units exist for the same purpose--the extraction of surplus value from exploited labor.

The forms of the encomienda and the plantation were the earliest large-scale forms. Indeed, an illuminating note by Marx give us an insight into the plantation system as the very model of the bourgeois/proletariat relationship--the relationship of the owners and the unowners, to quote Don L. Lee--intrinsic to capitalism. He writes:

"Concerning the treatment of slaves, I may mention, as a good compilation, that of Charles Comte, Traite de la Legislation, Third edition, Buresels, 1837. Those who want to learn what the bourgeois makes of himself and his world, whenever he can, without restraint, model the world after his own image, should study this matter in detail." ()

This conceptualization is a subject for another study. For our purposes here, we merely note that the interpretation of the plantation system as a slave mode of production rather than as a model of capitalism--indeed a "pure" model, as Marx implies--had had wide ranging ideological results. By means of this interpretation, the contemporary proletariat conceptualizes the slave as a fundamentally different type of laborer and loses any relation to a tradition which could throw much light on the present situation. Seeing the blacks on the plantation only as slaves--as completely other than ^{himself} themselves, "free men"--rather than as a form of exploited labor like ^{himself} themselves, ^{their} his slavery a more explicit form of their ^{his} so-called freedom, their "freedom" a form of ^{their} his slavery, the white worker remains unable to change his status. The

In the United States where the black slaves were part of a vast white majority, later forms of struggle were not limited to slave revolts. As C.L.R. James pointed out, one of these later forms was central to the mainstream of "official" history of the United States.

"After a generation of slave revolts--... the Negroes organized the underground railroad which rescued tens of thousands of slaves from the south and established communications between the insurgent elements of the South and North. In addition, as propagandists and organizers, Negroes were the basis of the abolition movements. The struggles centering around the abolition agitation, and especially the Fugitive Slave Law when the South attempted to restrict the democratic and civil liberties of the North, were the immediate causes which precipitated the Civil War." ()

Indeed the creation of the genre of the slave narrative as a literary form of propaganda and revolt--an indigenous American genre as Bontemps points out--called into question the institution of slavery in dramatic and universal terms which could be comprehended by contemporary readers. () As Bontemps writes, after having pointed out the deliberate oblivion into which the slave narratives had been allowed to fall,

"The Negro's suffering in his private hell of oppression was the point at which the narratives invariably began. Enduring this ordeal until he became desperate, or until he otherwise engaged the readers' interest or sympathy, the slave was eventually impelled to attempt the perils of escape.

that. One put one's life, one's manhood on the line: castration was an institutionalized punishment, a punishment fitting the crime of the assertion of manhood. The group therefore had to be constituted in such a manner that the life or manhood of the group could become more significant than that of the individual. It is to the extent that this was successful that the rebels died with such stoic bravery. Individual death did not mean the end. ~~The~~ group survived to the extent that the individual died silent, protecting the group, courageously bearing witness to the invulnerability of the group.

Later, as in the Nat Turner revolt, Christianity was adapted by the rebels, and parts of Christian doctrine were used to perform the same binding function. Where the ancestors had guaranteed a life over and beyond that of the individual, later God performed the same function. The real failure of William Styron's fictionalized version of Turner's confession lies in his incomprehension of the most significant statement in the original Nat Turner confessions: Turner saw his revolt as sanctioned and guided by God, and the group of rebels were bound to Nat by and through the binding force of this sanction. ()

The Christian God replaced the ancestral God but he still played the same function--that of a binding sanction whose force was stronger than that of the plantation owners. The uses, therefore, of the Myal society, of Voodoo, and of adapted forms of Christianity were essentially differently coded forms of the same response to the same struggle, forms that were logical ^{for the struggle} in the ~~context~~ of labor power in its slave form.

contemporary plantation system of monopoly capitalism ^{the} and therefore ^{we} cannot to understand and decipher the modern forms of colonization which ^{he} they experience ^{at} the hands of the corporate bourgeoisie.

If the forms change, the reality of exploitation remains the same. What the existence of a black popular culture shows us is that the mode of fighting against exploitation also took different forms. Until now Western culture has been ideologically illiterate concerning forms of conceptualization used by other cultures. The insights of ^{of} Lévi-Strauss and his disciples have changed all that. Now we can read ⁱⁿ the Myal Revolt in the language in which it was written. In a recent book of essays, (System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange, Tavistock Publications (London 1972) () Anthony Wilden develops a contemporary French theorist's concept of the inextricable link between writing and speech: writing as a logical prerequisite for all speech. In societies without writing in the Western sense, Wilden points out that,

"...the past of the society--its memory, its set of instructions, its sacred text, is literally embodied in every domicile, in every person or group marked by a kinship term or by a taboo, in every person or group who exemplifies a ritual or recalls a myth." ()

In other words, the oath-taking ceremonies and subsequent revolts were at one and the same time a form of praxis and an abstract theoretical activity. Neither could be separated from the other. The theory existed only in praxis; praxis was inseparable from theory. As Wilden goes on to point out,

"Except in so far as the ground plan of the village and/or various cultural objects and implements provide a minimal objective memory for the survival of the organization of

of the society from generation to generation, the significant distinctions in such a society have to be maintained, reconstructed, represented, and in essence, reinvented in the very flesh of each generation. Every living member of the system is both a message in the code and a message which maintains the code, a message which retains and remembers a part of the code." ()

One begins here to understand the aesthetic tradition of the blues, and even more, the central function of the dance. In cult ceremonies in the contemporary Caribbean, each devotee is constituted as an entity by his dedication to one of the gods. And each particular god is codified by his own rhythm, the rhythm which summons him to the ceremony. The possession of the worshipper by the god is therefore a rite through which he renews his contract with the god who guarantees his sense of self. The theology of African religions, as one anthropologist points out, is danced. ()

The dance in African life was even more central than writing is in contemporary Western society. It defined reality. Gustavus Vassa, the slave who went through the Middle Passage and later, when freed, wrote his life story, recalls his life before his capture and enslavement. After describing a wedding ceremony he comments:

"We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle or other cause of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion. The assembly is separated into four divisions, which dance either apart or in succession. The first assembly contains the married men, who in their dances frequently exhibit feats of arms and representation of a

battle. To these succeed the married women, who dance in the second division. The young men occupy the third, and the maidens the fourth. Each represents some interesting scene of real life, such as a great achievement, domestic employment, a pathetic story, or some rural sport; and as the subject is generally founded on some recent event, it is therefore ever new. This gives our dance a spirit and a variety which I have scarcely seen elsewhere." ()

So too, in the continuing oral culture of the slaves of Jamaica, the dance signaled revolt. The Myal ritual constituted the new man, making him conscious of himself as part of a group. The black oral culture of the New World constituted a counter-aesthetic which was at the same time a counter-ethnic. In the Myal ceremony the ethical values of the group were the aesthetic values of the group. Death in battle was a continuation of the ceremony. Courage and high spirits in the face of torture was the proof of the reenactment of the constitution of the self.

Later the minstrel stereotype, the grinning song and dance man, was but one side of the Janus face of a man who also danced for and through the gods. The dancing in the slave quarters had more than one meaning, which the owners quickly discovered. Thus, historians have been able to overlook the importance which this tradition of struggle played and continues to play in the indigenously, authentically revolutionary tradition of the American continent.

The oath in ^{the} Myal ceremony, was far from being a quaint custom or exotic superstition. It was a logical response. The form of struggle was dictated by the imperatives of the situation and the form of organization. And failure meant more than the possibility of going hungry. It went beyond