

Why Did the Slaves Resist the System or Slavery?

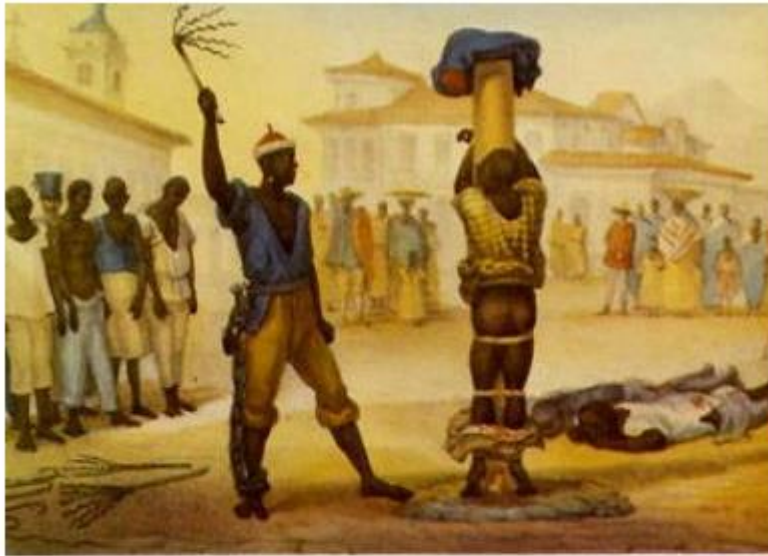
1. First and foremost is the basic **desire for freedom**. They rebelled against **their** owners- they did not want to be owned and treated as if they were a mere piece of property.
2. **Abuse** of the masters. Women in particular were raped, denied the right and time to bond with their children, name their children and so on.



Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave?

A female slave tied to a tree

3. Severe Punishments that did not fit the crime, but was far greater than the crime or offence. Methods of punishments included branding, of course whipping, putting them in stocks or amputating a limb.



Slave punishment



A slave being beaten

4. Forced labour: The ex-slaves worked without wages or reward for their labour. This was made even more difficult to bear when they considered that the planters were able to live in great houses, eat well and wear fine clothes because of the profit from the sugar that the slaves grew!

5. Denial of Rights. The slaves were denied the most basic human rights. African slaves were not allowed to keep the name that they received at birth but were forced to take on the name that their master gave them. They were forbidden to marry without the master's permission.

6. African slaves wanted to return home. They longed for their familiar sights and scenes of Mama Africa. They missed parents and siblings and friends back home. Some of them were leaders in their homeland and found it more difficult to adjust to a life of bondage: for example, Tacky was a chief in Ghana.

7. Inhumane treatment: slaves rebelled against and resisted the inhumane conditions under which they were forced to live and work. They worked from sunrise to sunset everyday and as much as eighteen (18) hours per day at harvest time. House slaves had to obey the 'whims and fancies' of the master. Spiteful mistresses often gave the attractive house slave girls 'demeaning' tasks to do. They were underfed and overworked.

There were two main types of Resistance: **Passive and Active.**

Passive resistance may be defined as the subtle methods used by the slaves to express their rejection of slavery. It is not easily detected.

Types of Passive Resistance

(a) Suicide: the African slaves in particular believed that after death their spirit returned to Africa. They were therefore willing to obtain the ultimate irreversible freedom.

(b) Malingering: we know this as 'go slow'. The slaves would deliberately work slower or below their productive capacity.

(c) Ill-treatment of estate animals: the slaves would deliberately wound the estate animal with intent to harm or kill them. **It would cost the planter** 'a pretty penny' to replace these animals.

(d) Murder by poison: arsenic was probably the most common form of poisoning but the slaves also used 'potions' that they obtained from the obeah men as well as their own concoction from trees and shrubs.

For example, in 1774, an overseer on a Barbadian plantation was murdered (poisoned) by his slaves.

(e) Feign madness: a slave would pretend to completely misunderstand every order given to him or her. In essence he would pretend to be 'stupid' or insane. We refer to this as the 'Quashie' syndrome. Some planters would keep such a slave for entertainment purposes.

(f) Feigning illness: the slaves would sometimes feign illness, prolong an old illness or even inflict fresh injuries.

(g) Runaways: running away or 'pulling foot' was a fairly common means of resistance.

What particular ways did female slaves rebel?

- They prolonged the weaning process-taking up to two years, so that she could make full advantage of the one hour in the morning and the one hour release given before the end of the day by some planters for breast feeding activities.
- Painful though the exercise was some women opted to deliberately miscarry or commit infanticide.
- Her tongue she discovered was also a very effective weapon. Thus insolence was a common charge or offence that the slave woman was incessantly charged for and found guilty!

Active Resistance: Revolts

The Bush Negroes

Runaway slaves in Surinam were called 'the Bush Negroes of Surinam'. The Bush Negroes of Surinam were given this specific title because of their choice of base when they ran away from the plantations. They hid in the tangled forest and swampy interior of the forest.

The first runaways escaped from the plantations set up by Lord Willoughby, the Governor of Barbados (1651). This explains why the Bush Negroes spoke Creole and all black surnames had an English base. Many of the runaway slaves were

brought from Africa and when they escaped to their hiding places, they maintained their African culture and religion.



Bush Negroes

However, during the Second Anglo-Dutch war, (1665-1667), the territory was captured by the Dutch. Dutch ownership was made official by the **Treaty of Breda** in 1667. During these two years of warfare the slaves took the opportunity to escape to the mountains, where they established independent communities/settlements.

The Bush Negroes lived in the forest clearings with their houses, (circular huts), surrounded by groves of plantations and cash crops from their small farms. These villages were often barricaded with moats, (deep holes filled with water), pits and stockades, which they used for protection. They also organized raids on the European plantations on military lines.

Eventually, the Dutch reorganized the independence of the Bush Negroes in the interior on the condition that they would not raid the coastal plantations. Treaties were signed between the Dutch and the Bush Negroes in 1749, 1761, and 1767.

There were six Bush Negro groups:

Djuka, Saramaka, Alubu, Ouca, Matawai, and Paramaka.

They lived inland along Saramaka, Copenaime and Cottica and Marowjine regions.

Terms of the Treaty (1761)

- An annual gift of arms and ammunition was promised to the Bush Negroes in return for their co-operation.
- The Bush Negroes were to return all new runaway slaves that they encountered.
- The Negroes promised never to appear armed at Paramaribo to more than or six at a time.
- The Bush Negroes were to keep their settlements at a certain distance from the towns and plantations.