

Enslaved Africans Rebel

Enslaved Africans plotted insurrections.

Enslaved Africans in the North Fight

A rebellion would only have a chance to succeed if Africans were armed. Unfortunately whites had more weapons, since it was against the law for an African to own a weapon.

In 1712 enslaved Africans were able to arm themselves. Twenty-five enslaved Africans with guns and clubs decided to burn down the homes of white enslavers in New York City. Nine whites were killed in the attack. Eventually, soldiers arrived and they defeated the rebelling Africans. Eighteen Africans involved in the rebellion were killed. Whenever a rebellion was defeated usually everyone involved in the rebellion was executed.

Born in Africa, Enslaved in America

Not every enslaved African planned a rebellion or an escape. Most enslaved Africans were born on slave plantations, and they never knew what freedom was like. They lived their entire life with someone telling them what to do, and beating them if they spoke back. In America most enslaved Africans were born on the plantation. However there were usually one or two enslaved Africans on a plantation who were born in Africa, and had been recently purchased by the plantation owner. They were born free, and desperately wanted to be free again.

Life was very difficult for these “new”

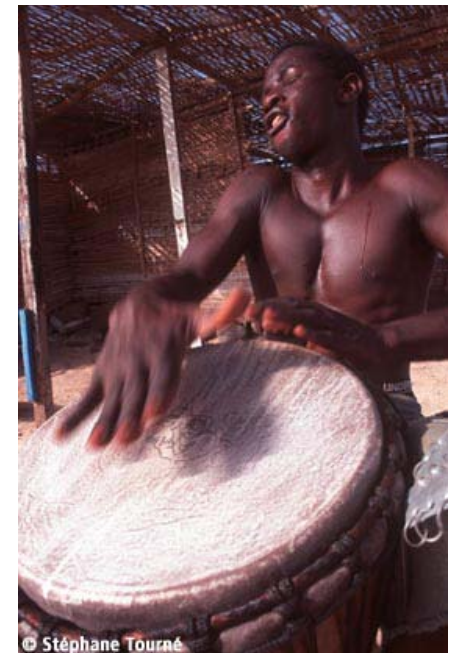
enslaved Africans. They didn't speak English. It would usually take 6-8 months before they could speak English. Like other enslaved Africans they didn't have any maps, and didn't know where they were. Whether they were on a plantation in Georgia or Louisiana, it might take years before they knew whether they were close to a free state or far away.

But back home in Africa, many of these “new” enslaved Africans had been warriors or leaders, and they were not willing to accept slavery.

Stono Rebellion

One African, a man named Jemmy, organized a rebellion in 1739. Jemmy had just recently been kidnapped and brought to America from Angola. It wasn't long before he decided to organize other Africans to obtain his freedom. He was able to organize almost 100 enslaved African men and women, some of them born in America and some born in Africa.

He used the drum to speak to other “new” enslaved Africans on other plantations. The drum is a very powerful instrument, and even though plantations were miles apart,



© Stéphane Touré
Drums were used by Africans in America to communicate and organize.

by using drums Africans could communicate. At the time whites would have to walk or travel by horse to speak with someone on another plantation. So the drums gave Africans in advantage. Also, whites didn't know what the songs meant.

These other “new” enslaved Africans knew the drum calls and responded. They met at the Stono River in South Carolina, and before long they had armed themselves and began to march towards Florida. At the time Florida was controlled by the Spanish, and anyone who made



Jemmy and the Stono rebels fought white enslavers.

it to Florida would be free. Jemmy probably had learned that South Carolina was much closer to Florida than to a free state in the North.

Jemmy and his allies left from their plantations in South Carolina, and killed whites along the way. Their success encouraged other enslaved Africans to join

them. Their group stopped in a large field to rest. While they rested southern whites formed a militia, and were pursuing them on horseback. The militia quickly caught up with Jemmy's group. They surrounded the group in an open field, and a bloody fight began. Forty-four Africans and twenty-one whites died.

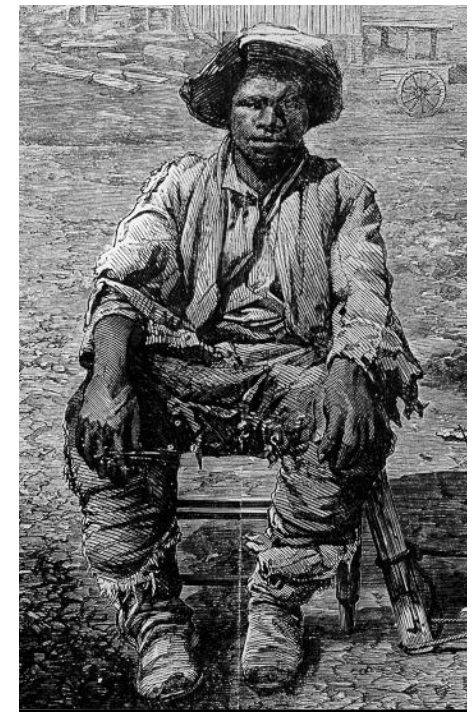
It didn't take long for southern whites to realize that Africans were using drums to speak, and not for entertainment. Soon, southern whites passed laws prohibiting Africans from using drums.

Gabriel Prosser

Gabriel Prosser was enslaved, but his kidnapper hired him to do other jobs away from the plantation. This allowed Gabriel to meet other Africans, both free and enslaved. Gabriel was seen as a leader by many because he was fearless. Once, Gabriel was attacked by a white overseer. The law did not allow Africans to attack whites, but Gabriel fought, and defeated the overseer easily. However, he was punished, and branded with a hot iron on his hand.

In 1800 Gabriel Prosser decided to fight against slavery. Gabriel worked with his brothers Martin and Solomon. Gabriel was a blacksmith and his brother Martin was a minister. Gabriel asked Solomon to begin making weapons, such as bullets, swords and knives. He planned to attack Richmond, the capitol of Virginia, and capture the state's governor. He recruited over 1,000 enslaved Africans. On their march to Richmond they would kill everyone they saw. However, Gabriel planned to spare the lives of Quakers, and other religious people who were against slavery, as well as poor whites. The life of poor whites wasn't much better than enslaved Africans.

On the day of the rebellion there was a terrible storm, and all the roads and bridges to Richmond were washed out. At the time there were no paved roads like today. All of the roads were just dirt roads, and a heavy storm would cause the rivers to overflow, and flood the roads and bridges. The rebels supporting Prosser waited for the storm to pass, but by the next day one of Gabriel's followers betrayed him.



Gabriel Prosser was a tall man, and very strong.

Gabriel escaped aboard a ship, but an enslaved African on the ship, recognized him, and turned him in. Gabriel, his brothers and others involved in the rebellion were caught and hung. Gabriel Prosser never lost hope, and never showed any fear.