



Slavery, Resistance and Repression
A Quantitative Empirical Investigation

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Abstract: In this article, we study what individual and social characteristics made it more likely for an individual to resist slavery. We employ a unique census from the Caribbean island of St. Croix in 1846, which allows us to study not only the characteristics of those that did resist slavery, but also of the whole enslaved population on the island. We analyze this data by using descriptive statistics as well as econometric analysis. Our findings show that relative deprivation played no role: individuals were as likely to resist slavery regardless of the relative status of the position they held. Resistance might have been more likely on small establishments, possibly the consequence of a greater level of trust among smaller groups of enslaved individuals. Gender also played a role in the types of resistance undertaken, and thereby possibly also in the risk of being detected and punished.

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1. Introduction

It is by now well-established in scholarly research that enslaved persons resisted their status.¹ Research has spanned the study of revolts and rebellions among the enslaved,² the history of runaways from enslavement, and of maroon communities formed by enslaved individuals in several parts of the Americas.³ Less dramatic than full-scale revolts or runaways was the everyday resistance that many enslaved put up.⁴ Analyzing everyday resistance empirically is generally challenging due to the lack of sources that can shed light

¹ For a recent literature review, see Douglas Egerton, “Slave Resistance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*. Edited by Robert L. Paquette and Mark M. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 447–64.

² Mark Michael Smith, *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (Univ of South Carolina Press, 2005); Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (Verso Books, 2013); John Samuel Harpham, “‘Tumult and Silence’ in the Study of the American Slave Revolts,” *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 257–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2014.916515>; Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 2019); Tom Zoellner, *Island on Fire: The Revolt That Ended Slavery in the British Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2020); Vincent Brown, *Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020); Marjoleine Kars, *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* (London: Profile, 2022).

³ E.g., Raymond K. Kent, “Palmares: An African State in Brazil,” *The Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (1965): 161–75; Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Garden City: Anchor P./Doubleday, 1973); David Geggus, “On the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Slave Runaways in Saint Domingue in the Year 1790,” *Slavery & Abolition* 6, no. 3 (December 1, 1985): 112–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440398508574896>; Neville Hall, “Maritime Maroons: ‘Grand Marronage’ from the Danish West Indies,” *The William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History And*, 1985, 476–98; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999); Ted Maris-Wolf, “Hidden in Plain Sight: Maroon Life and Labor in Virginia’s Dismal Swamp,” *Slavery & Abolition* 34, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 446–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2012.734090>; Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016); Simon P. Newman, “Rethinking Runaways in the British Atlantic World: Britain, the Caribbean, West Africa and North America,” *Slavery & Abolition* 38, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 49–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2016.1220582>; Enrique Corneiro, *Runaway Virgins: Danish West Indian Slave Ads 1770-1848* ([S.l.]: Lulu Com, 2019); Michael Sivapragasam, “The Second Maroon War: Runaway Slaves Fighting on the Side of Trelawny Town,” *Slavery & Abolition* 41, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 555–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2019.1662683>; Damian Pargas, *Freedom Seekers* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Elena A. Schneider, “A Narrative of Escape: Self Liberation by Sea and the Mental Worlds of the Enslaved,” *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 484–501, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2021.1927508>; David Alston, “The Guyana Maroons, 1796–1834: Persistent and Resilient until the End of Slavery,” *Slavery & Abolition* 44, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 292–316, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2023.2165065>.

⁴ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper, 1941), 99–105; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Random House, 1956); Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* ([Ithaca, [N.Y.]: Cornell U.P., 1982), 31–60; David Barry Gaspar, “Working the System: Antigua Slaves and Their Struggle to Live,” *Slavery & Abolition* 13, no. 3 (December 1, 1992): 131–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399208575070>; Judith Kafka, “Action, Reaction and Interaction: Slave Women in Resistance in the South of Saint Domingue, 1793–94,” *Slavery & Abolition* 18, no. 2 (August 1, 1997): 48–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399708575210>; Stephanie M.H. Camp, “‘I Could Not Stay There’: Enslaved Women, Truancy and the Geography of Everyday Forms of Resistance in the Antebellum Plantation South,” *Slavery & Abolition* 23, no. 3 (December 1, 2002): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714005245>; Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

on it. There is, certainly, qualitative evidence in, i.e., the many enslaved narratives that have survived and that testify to various forms of everyday resistance.⁵ Several previous studies on the topic have read pieces of such qualitative evidence closely, albeit these sources could be quite unrepresentative of the enslaved experience at large.⁶

As a result, just how common everyday resistance was, what forms it took, and who undertook it, is still not fully understood. A particular limitation of previous research concerns how typical or atypical rebels against slavery were. The aim of the present paper is to fill this gap by quantitatively studying whom, within a slave society, undertook acts of resistance against the slave regime. Our research question is: *Which individual and/or social characteristics made it more likely for an enslaved person to commit acts of resistance against the slavery regime?* To answer our research question, we employ unique information on punishments (or lack thereof), coupled with individual and social characteristics of the enslaved. We draw our empirical evidence from a census undertaken of all the enslaved individuals in a Caribbean slave society, namely St. Croix in what was the Danish West Indies (current-day US Virgin Islands) in the mid 19th century. St. Croix resembled many islands in the Caribbean: a plantation economy almost entirely based on cash crop production, primarily sugar, for export.⁷ As for much of the region, production had, for a long time, relied almost entirely on enslaved labour. At its peak in the late 18th century, around 90 percent of the population on the island was enslaved, but the share had by the time under study in this paper decreased somewhat.⁸ The decrease was due to demographic factors in combination with the international abolition of trade in enslaved people, prohibiting further imports.⁹

⁵ See for example John W Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: La. state U.P., 1977); Paul D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina P., 1979); Audrey A. Fisch, *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sophie White and Trevor Burnard, *Hearing Enslaved Voices: African and Indian Slave Testimony in British and French America, 1700-1848* (Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Incorporated, 2022).

⁶ E.g. David Thomas Bailey, “A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery,” *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 3 (1980): 381–404.

⁷ Poul Peter Sveistrup, *Bidrag til de tidligere dansk-vestindiske øers økonomiske historie: med særligt henblik paa sukkerproduktion og sukkerhandel* (Nielsen & Lydiches boktrykkeri, 1942); Poul Peter Sveistrup and Richard Willerslev, *Den Danske Sukkerhandels Og Sukkerproduktions Historie* (København, 1945); Neville Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John & St. Croix* (Mona: University of West Indies Press, 1994); Isaac Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States* (Kingston: Canoe Press, 1994), chap. 5; Poul Erik Olsen, ed., *Vestindien: St. Croix, St. Thomas Og St. Jan. Danmark Og Kolonierne* (Copenhagen: GADs forlag, 2017).

⁸ Dimitrios Theodoridis, Klas Rönnbäck, and Stefania Galli, “The Failed Promise of Freedom - Emancipation and Wealth Inequality in the Caribbean” (Göteborg Papers in Economic History, no. 33, Gothenburg, 2024), tbl. 1.

⁹ Erik Gøbel, *The Danish Slave Trade and Its Abolition* (Leiden ; Brill, 2016).

Manumissions of enslaved people already living on the island further reinforced these trends.¹⁰

2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis in this study falls at the crossroads between the history of slavery, research on political rebellions, and research on social movements. One classic theory from the research on political rebellions is the *relative deprivation theory*. Such theory suggests that people partake in rebellions or revolts if they belong in groups suffering from *relative deprivation* vis-a-vis other groups in society.¹¹ Individuals suffering from relative deprivation would have less to lose from acts of resistance, compared to individuals relatively more privileged. Our first hypothesis is therefore:

H1: enslaved individuals who were assigned to positions of lower status would be more likely to resist the system of slavery than those who were assigned to positions associated with somewhat higher status.

Secondly, research on social movements have emphasized a number of factors influencing why individuals may resist oppression. We are here able to study whether certain *structural conditions* influenced the probability to resist the oppressive institution.¹² One potential structural condition was the size and structure of the establishments where the enslaved individuals worked. This has, in other historical contexts, been shown to be important, for example in the case of trade union activities.¹³ A large establishment might thus, on the one hand, create some degree of critical mass of individuals necessary for a movement to emerge and grow; on the other hand, the establishment size might be a challenge for creating trust and well-functioning social networks within a group. The size of an establishment might, in addition, be associated with different management practices lending themselves to varying degrees of resistance. Previous research has not reached a consensus as to whether there is any association between the size of establishments and the

¹⁰ Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John & St. Croix*, chap. 8.

¹¹ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J., 1971); Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper, *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, Third Edition (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 53–54; for a review of empirical studies on the topic, see Gudrun Østby, “Inequality and Political Violence: A Review of the Literature,” *International Area Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (June 2013): 206–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2233865913490937>.

¹² Goodwin and Jasper, *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, 54.

¹³ E.g., Bruce E. Kaufman, “The Determinants of Strikes over Time and across Industries,” *Journal of Labor Research* 4, no. 2 (June 1983): 159–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02685174>.

propensity to join a movement, and – if so – whether the association is negative or positive. We can therefore formulate two competing hypotheses:

H2a: large establishments created a critical mass for resistance against slavery. The size of the establishment was consequently positively associated with the probability of acts of resistance.

H2b: small establishments enabled a greater degree of trust and social networks to develop between the enslaved. The size of the establishment was consequently negatively associated with the probability of acts of resistance.

Thirdly, much research has been undertaken into various forms of resistance against enslavement. One key issue emphasized by several scholars in the field is the gendered nature of this resistance: enslaved women faced different challenges, and resisted in different ways, compared to men.¹⁴ Our third hypothesis is therefore:

H3: there are gender differences as to acts of resistance against slavery.

3. Empirical Data

The study is based on the 1846 census of the island of St. Croix in the Danish West Indies. The census has been made available online by the Danish National Archive.¹⁵ The contents of the census was digitized as part of the construction of a large panel dataset on the economic and demographic history of the island.¹⁶ This census provides a unique opportunity to study not only the individuals involved in resistance against slavery, as close readings of qualitative records often have done, but also those who seemingly were *not* involved in such acts. This can help enlighten us specifically on the individual and/or social characteristics that made resistance to slavery more likely.

¹⁴ See for example Mary Ellison, “Resistance to Oppression: Black Women’s Response to Slavery in the United States,” *Slavery & Abolition* 4, no. 1 (May 1, 1983): 56–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440398308574851>; Barbara Bush, “Towards Emancipation: Slave Women and Resistance to Coercive Labour Regimes in the British West Indian Colonies, 1790–1838*,” *Slavery & Abolition* 5, no. 3 (December 1, 1984): 222–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440398408574875>; Kafka, “Action, Reaction and Interaction”; Camp, “I Could Not Stay There”; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; Ana Lucia Araujo, “Black Purgatory: Enslaved Women’s Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Rio Grande Do Sul, Brazil,” *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 568–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2014.1001159>.

¹⁵ See Rigsarkivet, Arkivalieronline: <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/collection/theme/8>.

¹⁶ Stefania Galli, Klas Rönnbäck, and Dimitrios Theodoridis, “Reconstructing a Slave Society: Building the DWI Panel, 1760-1914” (Working paper, University of Gothenburg, 2023), <https://hdl.handle.net/2077/78393>.

The census contains information on the age, gender, religion, and marital status of the population, including the enslaved members of the population. As the census was collected by plantation or geographical address in the towns, we also know the place of residence of all the individuals, as well as the number of persons living on and working at different locations. Most importantly, the census recorded two additional pieces of information about the enslaved: how the masters evaluated their “moral character”, and whether the enslaved had ever been “punished” for some crime. We have not been able to determine the authorities’ intention when including these two latter questions in the census. It does, however, seem plausible that this information was recorded as part of the process of ameliorating slavery underway in the Danish colony at this time.¹⁷

The column that the masters filled in information about the “moral character” of the enslaved persons was most often used to enter value judgements about the enslaved individuals, e.g., “bad” or “good”. In a smaller number of cases, the information was somewhat more substantial, referring to more specific character traits. It is important to remember that this characterization was provided by the master, and is unlikely to reflect what the enslaved really thought and their personal nature. “Good” character traits, according to a slave-master, entailed a number of characteristics, e.g., hardworking, obedient and submissive.¹⁸ The terror and violence underlying the system of slavery undoubtedly led many enslaved persons to hide their true selves before the masters.¹⁹ Anecdotal evidence from the source, suggesting that this indeed could be the case, is the example of the leaders of the 1848 slave revolt on St. Croix: John Gottliff (a.k.a. Budhoe) from Estate La Grange, Peter Benjamin Rankin and Frederik from Mount Pleasant, Martin William from Ham’s Bay, Cancer from Mount Washington, Isaac from Estate Prosperity, and Moses Robert from Butlers Bay.²⁰ Several of these individuals can be identified in the census taken just two years prior to the revolt: Gottliff was there described by the master of the La Grange plantation as having an “indifferent” moral character, two of the others (Isaac from Estate Prosperity, and Frederik from Estate Mount Pleasant) are possibly

¹⁷ Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John & St. Croix*, chap. 11.

¹⁸ Gunvor Simonsen, *Slave Stories : Law, Representation, and Gender in the Danish West Indies* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2017), 51.

¹⁹ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 132–53; Harpham, “‘Tumult and Silence’ in the Study of the American Slave Revolts,” 261.

²⁰ Svend Holsoe, “The 1848 St. Croix Slave Rebellion: The Day of the Rebellion,” in *Negotiating Enslavement: Perspectives on Slavery in the Danish West Indies*. Edited by Arnold Highfield and George Tyson (St. Croix: Antilles Press, 2009), 194–96; Arnold Highfield, *The Cultural History of the American Virgin Islands and the Danish West Indies: A Companion Guide* (Christiansted: Antilles Press, 2018), 86.

classified in negative terms, but the remaining four were all described in positive terms as to their “moral character”.²¹ It does not seem far-fetched to assume that several of them had successfully put up a façade before their masters, while in reality they might have been scheming a rebellion.

The most crucial information for our study is, however, the variable “punishments”, meted out against the enslaved individuals who ostensibly had committed some crime. The full query for this variable in the census is “If ever as criminals punished by Judgement or by the Governor General’s Resolution and when and how punished”. Everyone convicted of, and hence punished for, a crime would thus presumably be reported as such in the census. Slave laws in the Danish West Indies were for a long time draconian, with very brutal physical punishments meted out – including branding, mutilations, amputations, and the ubiquitous whippings. For repeated or more severe crimes, the punishment was death, and then often a very painful death at that. The acts that were criminalized in the slave laws were, as previous scholars have noted, preoccupied particularly with acts of resistance against the slavery regime.²² The acts criminalized therefore included anything from congregating in public or running away, to disobedience, thefts, sabotage or violence against members of the masterclass.²³

The majority of the masters only responded to the first part of the query – *if* the enslaved individuals ever had been punished – and generally failed to answer both *how* and *when* enslaved had been punished. Albeit the census did not explicitly inquire *what crime* the enslaved were punished for, this was, nonetheless, reported in some cases. John, a 38-year-old field laborer on the Cane Garden estate, had been punished for having run away and having been absent for two weeks. Kitty Roberts, a 56-year-old cook working in

²¹ There are for several of these men multiple people in the census with similar names. There was only one Cancer at Mount Washington, and he was reported as having a “good” moral character, and there is only one by the name of Gottliff (thus described as “indifferent”). All individuals by the name of Peter or Benjamin at Mount Pleasant were described as of a “good” moral character. The same was the case for all three people by the name of Martin or William at Ham’s Bay, and the two people by the name of Moses at Butlers Bay. There were two people by the name of Isaac at Prosperity: one of them was described as “bad”, while the other was “good”. There were four people by the name of Frederick at Mount Pleasant: one of them was described as “not good”, while the other three were described as “good”.

²² Poul Erik Olsen, “Slavery and the Law in the Danish West Indies,” in *Negotiating Enslavement: Perspectives on Slavery in the Danish West Indies*. Edited by Arnold Highfield and George Tyson (St. Croix: Antilles Press, 2009), 6.

²³ Neville Hall, “Slave Laws in the Danish Virgin Islands in the Later Eighteenth Century,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*. Edited by Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden (New York, N.Y.: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977), 174–75; Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John & St. Croix*, chap. 3; Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 154–56; Olsen, “Slavery and the Law in the Danish West Indies”; William Boyer, *America’s Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrongs*, Second edition (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2010), 26–30.

Frederiksted, was for her part punished for “fighting in the streets”. The source does not report who this street-fighting woman had fought with. Furthermore, only in a handful of cases is the *punishment* spelled out: the 59-year-old carpenter Petrus was, for example, punished with 150 lashes and “wore irons for 6 months” albeit the reason for his punishment is not reported. As it appears, our source informs us on *whether* a person had been punished, rather than on the nature of the crime or the punishment meted out. This information is, however, relevant to us as masters also reported when the enslaved had *never* been subjected to any such punishments. The source thus provides direct evidence on *whether or not* an individual had undergone some punishment for a crime. The source, thereby, enables us to estimate the likelihood of being punished for a crime.

We believe that most, if not all, of the acts criminalized and punished could be considered as one or another form of resistance to slavery. In cases where the source explicitly reveals the crime committed, these are predominantly of three types: insubordination (e.g., threatening somebody), marronage, or thefts (see Table 3 below). All of these types of acts have been characterized as resistance strategies against slavery in previous research.²⁴ Among the persons punished for an unspecified crime, however, there might be acts that had little or nothing to do with resistance against the system of slavery. To the extent that other, non-slavery related, crimes were committed, they are likely to feature as noise in the econometric analysis undertaken in this paper.

The acts of everyday resistance that can be found in the source are just the tip of the iceberg. We do, nonetheless, believe that the data can be used to study *who the agents undertaking such acts were*, as masters (as well as the colonial authorities) had an interest in detecting and punishing criminal acts of resistance, no matter who the culprit was.²⁵

There are, however, certain limitations of our data. Individuals committing acts of resistance who were never identified – e.g., people committing thefts or acts of sabotage who were never caught – would not appear in our data. We cannot, from our source, know how common the undetected and/or unreported acts of resistance against slavery were on St. Croix - we can only measure acts that were *both* detected *and* reported to the colonial authorities. Another limitation of the very nature of our source – a census – is that it requires that the individuals were alive at the time the census was taken, and still were living

²⁴ E.g., Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 99–105; Craton, *Testing the Chains*; Gaspar, “Working the System,” 134.

²⁵ Hall, “Slave Laws in the Danish Virgin Islands in the Later Eighteenth Century,” 184.

on the island of St. Croix. Enslaved persons who successfully ran away would, naturally, not feature in this source.²⁶ The most brutal form of punishment allowed by the slave laws was death.²⁷ Anyone subjected to this punishment would thus not appear in the source. Furthermore, anyone sentenced to transportation would for similar reasons not feature in the source. The number of death or transportation sentences was, however, by the nineteenth century quite low in absolute terms.²⁸ Yet another limitation would be if some masters were more inclined to report crimes to the colonial authorities than others. Slave-masters had the prerogative to punish those that they enslaved for misdemeanors.²⁹ It is possible that some masters, e.g., rural planters, used this prerogative to punish enslaved persons themselves rather than taking the time to report crimes to the colonial authorities, due to the geographical distance to where the legal courts were located, even in cases where the colonial authorities in theory should have been responsible. Urban slave-masters may, on the other hand, have had easier access to the colonial legal system due to their geographical proximity. If that indeed was the case, we would expect an under-reporting of crimes committed on rural plantations. In the analysis, we attempt to control for geography by including a rural dummy as a control variable.

4. Econometric Analysis

We undertake a multivariate logistic analysis to identify the factors associated with the probability of undertaking acts of resistance against slavery. We then use the information on 'having been punished' for some crime as a proxy for acts of resistance and for the agents resisting slavery. We estimate the odds ratios of the independent variables. An odds ratio below 1 means a lower probability of having been punished for a crime than the benchmark category, and an odds ratio above 1 means a higher probability of having been punished for a crime than the benchmark category.

In order to test *relative deprivation theory*, we employ the occupation of the enslaved individuals as recorded in the source. We use this data in two different ways: in our core model, we classify the individuals into different categories depending on the occupation

²⁶ Hall, "Maritime Maroons"; Corneiro, *Runaway Virgins*.

²⁷ Hall, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies: St. Thomas, St. John & St. Croix*, chap. 3; Olsen, "Slavery and the Law in the Danish West Indies"; Boyer, *America's Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrongs*, 26–30.

²⁸ Simonsen, *Slave Stories*, fig. F.

²⁹ Dookhan, *A History of the Virgin Islands of the United States*, 154–56.

they were reported to hold, employing the HISCLASS-scheme.³⁰ We then differentiate between low status occupations (HISCLASS 10, 11 or 12) and somewhat more privileged occupations (HISCLASS 1-9). As a robustness check, we also group occupational titles by broad definition, dividing the sample into: field labourers, craftsmen, domestic workers, others, unknown.

In order to test whether the size of an establishment had any impact upon the propensity to undertake acts of resistance, we use the number of enslaved persons recorded on a particular geographical location as an explanatory variable. As the census was undertaken by geographic location (by plantation in the countryside, or by address in the two towns on the island), we can easily calculate the number of enslaved persons per establishment. As we would not expect the relationship to be necessarily linear, we also divide the size of establishments into a categorical variable taking three values: small establishments (1st–25th percentile of the enslaved population in the sub-sample, which in this sub-sample means 8 or less enslaved individuals), medium-sized establishments (25th–50th percentiles, i.e. 9–90 enslaved individuals) and large establishments (51st–100th percentiles of the enslaved population, i.e. establishments with more than 90 enslaved individuals).

In order to test if there are gender differences as to the resistance against slavery, we employ the information on gender from the source in the form of a dummy variable.

We furthermore make use of the information provided under the header “moral character” in our analysis. We classify the information into a categorical variable depending on how the master evaluated the individual – very negatively, negatively, neutrally, positively or very positively – based on the wording in the source. Again, it is important to remember that this is an evaluation of how well the enslaved conformed to what the masters wanted, and not an evaluation of the individuals as human beings. Keywords in the source classified as negative include “bad”, “lazy”, “idle”, and many others. If the master had added the reinforcement word *very* (e.g., “very bad”, “very lazy”), we consequently classified this as very negative. We classify a characterization as neutral if keywords such as “common”, “ordinary” or “tolerable” were employed. Positive keywords were “good”, “fair”, “diligent” and several others. If the reinforcement word *very* was employed for positive words (e.g., “very good”), we correspondingly classified the characterization as

³⁰ Marco H. D. van Leeuwen and Ineke Maas, *HISCLASS: A Historical International Social Class Scheme* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011).

very positive. As a result, our variable can take either of five values: from very negative to very positive.

Finally, we also make use of several other variables available in the census as controls: age, religious affiliation, marital status and place of residence. Age is used as a continuous variable, whereas the rest are included as categorical variables. Robustness tests, including variations to the model specification, are reported in the supplemental online material to the paper.

5. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for our sample of observations. In total, there were 16,480 enslaved persons who lived on St. Croix at the time according to the census (see Table 1, column A). Most of the enslaved persons were living on rural plantations, held various unskilled occupations, and the majority belonged to the protestant faith. The dominant type of occupation in the low status category was the field laborer, but a small number of individuals holding a couple of other occupations can also be found in this category, including charwomen, porters, street vendors and fishermen. In the category of higher status occupations, we find on the one hand a large number of domestic or house servants (either in cities or on the plantations), as well as different craftsmen (e.g., blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers and masons). Information on “moral character” was diligently filled in by virtually all of the slave-masters on the island; information is missing for less than one percent of the enslaved population.

Data is more frequently missing for the variable “punishments”: information for this variable is, unfortunately, only available for a sample of 4,176 enslaved persons, ca. 25 percent of the enslaved population (see Table 1, column B). The sample (column B of Table 1) is quite representative of the full population (i.e., comparing columns A and B) when it comes to most characteristics, including age and gender of the enslaved, their “moral character”, and their marital status. There is, however, a certain difference between the full population and the sample in terms of their place of residence: while most enslaved lived in the countryside when looking at the full population (92 percent), only 69 percent of the sample lived in the rural areas. We also have a corresponding under-representation of large establishments, all situated in the countryside. Many large-scale rural planters had thus simply not bothered filling in the column on whether or not the individuals had been “punished”, whereas slave-masters in urban areas had been more diligent in filling in this

information. This is something that must be taken into consideration when analyzing our sample. It is also important to remember that our study is based on one census, i.e., a cross-section of data. We are, for that reason, unable to determine the direction of causality of any association that we may identify.

TABLE 1 *Descriptive statistics of dataset*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>A. Full population</i>		<i>B. Sample w info on punishments</i>		<i>C. Reported as having been punished</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Status of occupation</i>						
Lower status	10,885	66.1	2,322	55.6	150	71.8
Higher status	2,425	14.7	1,066	25.5	43	20.6
[Info missing]	3,170	19.2	788	18.9	16	7.7
<i>Size of establishment</i>						
Small establishment	1,146	7.0	1,051	25.2	31	14.8
Medium-sized establishment	3,641	22.1	1,018	24.4	45	21.5
Large establishment	11,693	71.0	2,107	50.5	133	63.6
<i>Master's evaluation of enslaved person's "moral character"</i>						
Very negative	99	0,6	41	1.0	23	11.0
Negative	710	4,3	187	4.5	61	29.2
Neutral	1,799	10,9	447	10.7	65	31.1
Positive	13,425	81,5	3,432	82.2	53	25.4
Very positive	309	1,9	59	1.4	0	0.0
[Info missing]	138	0,8	10	0.2	7	3.4
<i>Gender</i>						
Female	8,741	53.0	2,239	53.6	46	22.0
Male	7,735	46.9	1,935	46.3	163	78.0
[Info missing]	4	0.0	2	0.01	0	0.0
<i>Place of residence</i>						
Rural	15,149	91.9	2,900	69.4	177	84.7
Urban	1,331	8.1	1,276	30.6	32	15.3
<i>Religion</i>						
Protestant	10,779	65.4	2,960	70.9	146	69.9
Roman Catholic	5,619	34.1	1,179	28.2	59	28.2
Other/unknown	82	0.5	37	0.9	4	1.9
<i>Marital status</i>						
Unmarried	15,492	94.0	3,910	93.6	192	91.9
Married	921	5.6	246	5.9	17	8.1
Widow	64	0.4	20	0.5	0	0.0
[Info missing]	3	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>16,480</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>4,176</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>209</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Sources: Danish West Indies Economic and Demographic Panel (henceforth DWI Panel)

6. Who Was Punished For Crimes?

Column C of Table 1 shows the characteristics of those enslaved who actually *had* been punished for some crime at least once. Comparing the characteristics of those punished with those of the whole sample for which information is available (column B of table 1) can hint at factors associated with acts of resistance against slavery. One very general conclusion we can draw from the data is the large variety in the type of individuals who had been punished for some crime, from gender, to location, to size of the establishment to occupation and religious affiliation.

The first variable of interest in this study is occupational status. Individuals holding lower status occupations (i.e., field hands) indeed seem to be over-represented among those who had been punished: whereas 56 percent of the sample was made up of people holding lower status occupations, 78 percent of those punished for some crime held such occupations. The data also seem to suggest that crimes were unproportionally common among those who worked on larger establishments (i.e., large plantations): 51 percent of the sample worked on large establishments, but 64 percent of those punished for some crime did so.

Women were underrepresented among those punished for some crime: whereas 54 percent of the sample was made up of women, only 22 percent of the those reported as having been punished for some crimes were women. Vice versa, men made up 46 percent of the sample, but 78 percent of those punished for some crime were men.

Enslaved living in urban areas were under-represented, and vice versa for those living in rural areas: whereas 69 percent of the sample for which we have information on whether they had been punished lived in rural areas, 85 percent of those actually punished for some crime lived in this area. The data does, at first glance, then not seem to suffer from the under-reporting rural bias we pointed at previously.

The master's evaluation of the individuals "moral character" was also possibly associated with having been punished for crimes: those reported as having a negative or very negative "moral character" were over-represented among those who were reported as having been punished for some crime. This is, however, unsurprising, as a master presumably would characterize most of those that had been punished for some crime in negative terms. It is, in our mind, rather quite surprising that as many as one fourth of those that had been punished for some crime, nonetheless, were characterized in positive

terms as to their “moral character”. As for the two final variables – marital status and religious faith – those reported as punished for some crime seem to be quite representative of the sample.

What looks like an over- or under-representation in the descriptive statistics might, however, disappear as we control for several factors simultaneously. We therefore turn to a multivariate logistic analysis to identify the factors associated with the probability of having been punished for some crime. Table 2 shows the results from the econometric analysis.

The first variable of interest in our analysis is the occupational status of the enslaved. Our hypothesis, derived from *relative deprivation theory*, was that individuals assigned to lower status occupations – in our case, primarily field laborer on plantations – would be more prone to take actions of resistance against slavery than those who had been assigned to higher status positions. Our results show *no* statistically significant association between status and the probability of having been punished for criminal acts (Table 2): the odds ratio is lower for individuals with higher status occupations, but the difference is not statistically significant at conventional confidence levels. The evidence would thus not lend support to deprivation theory being an important explanatory factor in this case. The results are furthermore robust to all changes in the specifications we carry out in our robustness checks in the online supplemental material.

Another key variable is the size of an establishment. Our expectation was that this would be associated with the probability of resisting slavery, albeit theoretically undetermined *a priori* whether the association would be positive or negative. Our findings suggest that the association with our dependent variable was *negative* when controlling for other variables: enslaved living on medium-sized and large establishments were *less* likely to have been punished for some crime than enslaved people living on small establishments. These results are also robust to all changes in the specification carried out in our robustness checks. As it happens, the vast majority of small establishments were located in urban areas, and all large establishments in rural areas, albeit we introduce a geographical dummy to explicitly control for geography. The effect is the strongest for medium-sized establishments, i.e., the enslaved living and working at these establishments had the lowest odds ratios of having been punished for some crime. We are unable to determine for certain whether this is a statistical artefact for this particular sample of data, or an indication of a real, non-linear relationship.

TABLE 2 *Descriptive statistics of dataset*

	Odds ratios
<i>Occupational status</i>	
Low	1.00
High	0.84 (0.20)
Unknown occupation	0.48*** (0.14)
<i>Establishment size</i>	
Small establishment	1.00
Medium-sized establishment	0.34*** (0.12)
Large establishment	0.50* (0.19)
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	1.00
Male	3.78*** (0.79)
<i>Place of residence</i>	
Rural	1.00
Urban	0.43** (0.16)
<i>Master's evaluation of "moral character"</i>	
Very negative	8.96*** (3.27)
Negative	2.43*** (0.55)
Neutral	1.00
Positive	0.10*** (0.02)
Very positive	(omitted)
<i>Age</i>	1.02*** (0.00)
<i>Religious affiliation</i>	
Protestant	1.00
Roman Catholic	0.80 (0.15)
Other / Unknown	3.37** (1.73)
<i>Marital status</i>	
Unmarried	1.00
Married	1.44 (0.48)
Constant	0.10*** (0.05)
Observations	4,086

Sources: DWI Panel

Enslaved men were more likely to have been punished for some crime than enslaved women, confirming the over-representation observed in Table 1. If punishments are a good reflection of acts of resistance, this result would thus suggest that men might have participated more actively in resistance against slavery. As we discuss below, however, it might reflect different means of resistance, rather than the probability of acts of resistance *per se*.

Several of the control variables did, furthermore, yield statistically significant results. Enslaved persons living in urban areas were, according to our core model, *less* likely to have been punished for some crime than those living in rural areas, once controlling for size of establishment. This would be noteworthy, as we expected that rural planters may have under-reported crimes committed there. The lower odds ratio for the urban population is, however, not entirely robust to changes in the model reported in the supplemental online material. Our tentative conclusion is therefore that we cannot conclude with certainty that the odds ratio for having been punished for a crime was lower for the urban population, but that the estimates in general suggest that they at least were *not* higher. It does therefore seem as if the urban reporting-bias in our sample does not affect our results much.

In addition, age was associated with the probability of having been punished for a crime if we include all age groups. This is hardly surprising as the census asked whether a person had *ever* been punished for a crime. If we exclude children below the age of 15 from the sample (see Table A1, model 3, in the supplemental online material), age no longer exhibits a statistically significant association with the probability of having been punished for a crime. The master's evaluation of the enslaved persons "moral character" was furthermore associated with the probability of having been punished for a crime. This, too, is hardly surprising, as noted before. Religious affiliation and marital status are, finally, *not* associated with the probability of having been punished. The only exception is the category of people of "other/unknown" religious affiliation; they faced a substantially higher risk of having been punished for a crime. This is explained by the fact that, out of this very small group of people in this part of the sample, four people (two of them reported in the sources as "unbaptized", and two of unknown faith) had committed crimes for which they had been punished.

7. What Types of Acts Were Punished?

Our source can also shed some light on the types of resistance that the enslaved took against the oppressive slavery system. For a number of cases, we know what acts individuals were punished for, reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3. *Types of crimes that the enslaved were punished for, by gender*

	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Child neglect/abuse etc	0	0	3	23
Fighting	0	0	1	8
Insubordination	4	17	3	23
Maroonage	3	13	4	31
Theft/robbery	16	70	2	15
Total known	23	100	13	100
Unknown criminal act	140		33	

Sources: Danish West Indies Economic and Demographic Panel (henceforth DWI Panel)

Prior to the analysis, it is noteworthy that the type of crime committed was available only for a small fraction (17 percent) of those reported as having ever been punished for some crime, requiring caution in the inference drawn upon this data. What we nonetheless can conclude is that virtually all criminal acts that previous scholarship has classified as examples of everyday resistance against slavery, i.e., subordination, marronage and thefts are included in our sample.³¹ A few women were, in addition, punished for other acts: one for having neglected her own child, another for having caused the death of an unnamed child, and a third for having pretended pregnancy. It is certainly possible that some of these were also acts intended as resistance against the oppressive system, but this is potentially less clear-cut than, say, marronage.³² As can be seen in Table 3, there are some gender differences: many of the men were punished for thefts or robberies, whereas women were punished for running away to a greater extent, as well as for the crimes related to child caring/rearing.

The information on the “moral character” in the census can provide additional insights into behaviors that the slave-masters disliked. In several cases, the masters used keywords

³¹ E.g., Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 99–105; Craton, *Testing the Chains*; Gaspar, “Working the System,” 134.

³² See Ellison, “Resistance to Oppression”; and Araujo, “Black Purgatory” for examples of similar acts interpreted as acts of resistance.

concerning the enslaved individuals that give some indication as to why a master evaluated them negatively. These are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4. *Negative characterizations of the enslaved, by gender*

	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Illness & alcohol consumption	17	10	7	6
”Immorality”	3	2	7	6
Insubordination	12	7	26	21
”Laziness”	14	8	34	27
”Meddling”	108	63	45	36
Runaway	11	6	1	1
Temperament	3	2	4	4
Thefts	4	2	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>172</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: DWI panel

A few persons were described as either physically or mentally ill – whether these illnesses were real, or the individuals in question feigned illness as a resistance strategy is not possible to tell from the source.³³ There were also a number of people described as drunkards (even this has by some scholars been interpreted as a form of resistance against slavery).³⁴ But the sources also shed light on other characteristics that seem to reflect a more direct and unequivocal resistance against the exploitation that the enslaved were suffering from. A fair share of the enslaved were described as being insubordinate, in various ways: the 35-year-old seamstress Ann Mary was, for example, described as “self-willed”, whereas the 24-year-old field labourer Daniel was labelled as “insolent”. Other terms commonly employed about the enslaved persons were “impudent”, “saucy” or “quarrelsome”. Most of these were reported as never having been punished for a crime, so their insubordination had never reached a level where the masters found it necessary to

³³ Gaspar, “Working the System,” 134.

³⁴ Kathryn Benjamin Golden, “‘Very Fond of Spirituous Liquors’: Alcohol and Fugitive Black Life in the Slaveholding South,” *Slavery & Abolition*, July 26, 2023, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2023.2240796>.

report them to the authorities for some crime committed. Whether the master had meted out some punishment of their own is, as noted at the outset of this paper, not possible to tell. Other individuals were instead described as runaways or as thieves: the 7-year-old field laborer Manuel was, for example, only characterized with the words “runs away”, and likewise was the 54-year-old woman Cecilia. These character traits so far reflect quite well some of the key crimes committed by those punished (see Table 3). The most common negative characterization employed by the masters were, however, that the enslaved persons were “meddling”. Exactly what was meant by this is unfortunately hard to determine, but a possible interpretation is that these persons might have tried to interfere with how the masters managed the establishment (including the oppression of the enslaved) in various ways, but potentially not in a manner serious enough for the master to consider it criminal.

8. Discussion

It is by now well-established that violence was an integral part of the system of slavery.³⁵ The physical violence was furthermore but one part of the repressive nature of the slavery regime. Just as important was the additional *fear* of punishment.³⁶ The very point of employing violence was as a rule not just to punish a particular person into submission, but also to terrorize all of the other enslaved – on a plantation, or even more broadly, throughout a whole community or society. The point of a brutal whipping was then to set an example for everyone else in the enslaved community. Punishments against the enslaved were for that particular reason often meted out in public.³⁷

In this paper, we have tried to understand what individual and/or social characteristics that made resistance against slavery as a system more probable. One result of this paper, reported in Table 2, is that we find no association between the relative deprivation of the

³⁵ E.g. Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); for references to much of the older literature, see Paul Farnsworth, “Brutality or Benevolence in Plantation Archaeology,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 4, no. 2 (2000): 145, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009547520175>.

³⁶ Richard Sutch, “The Treatment Received by American Slaves: A Critical Review of the Evidence Presented in Time on the Cross,” *Explorations in Economic History* 12, no. 4 (1975): 342; Herbert G. Gutman and Richard Sutch, “Sambo Makes Good, or Were Slaves Imbued with the Protestant Work Ethic?,” in *Reckoning with Slavery. Edited by Paul A. David, Herbert G. Gutman, Richard Sutch, Peter Temin and Gavin Wright* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 58.

³⁷ Gutman and Sutch, “Sambo Makes Good, or Were Slaves Imbued with the Protestant Work Ethic?,” 59; Henrice Altink, ““An Outrage on All Decency”: Abolitionist Reactions to Flogging Jamaican Slave Women, 1780-1834,” *Slavery & Abolition* 23, no. 2 (August 1, 2002): 107–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714005229>.

enslaved, proxied by occupation, and the probability that they had been punished for some crime. Enslaved persons who were assigned positions that had a somewhat higher status – most importantly domestic servants and craftsmen – were seemingly no less likely to resist their enslavement than those who were assigned positions of lower status, such as the field laborers on plantations. We would not expect that the risk of apprehension (and hence the risk of being punished) would be strongly associated with the relative status of the occupation. If there was any association, furthermore, we would expect that masters might have been prone to under-report crimes committed by some of the more highly skilled enslaved persons, such as the craftsmen, as the masters potentially would want to use “carrots” instead of the whip to incentivize these more highly skilled enslaved workers.³⁸ If that indeed was the case, our estimates may be downwards biased when estimating the probability that persons suffering from lesser degree of relative deprivation had committed any crime, and the real probability would have been higher than what we estimate for this group. The evidence would thus lead us to *reject* hypothesis H1, that relative deprivation was an explanatory factor for the resistance against slavery in this case. Our interpretation is that slavery was such an oppressive institution that resistance could be found among all classes of enslaved individuals.

A second finding of this paper is that enslaved persons living and working on medium-sized and large-scale plantations faced a significantly lower probability of having been punished for a crime than those living and working on small-scale establishment, with only a handful of enslaved persons. The association would thus suggest that resistance against slavery might have been more common on small-scale establishments than on large-scale ones. A possible explanation of this would be that resistance primarily was undertaken in a setting where the enslaved knew, and potentially could trust, all the other enslaved persons on the same establishment. On larger-scale establishments, a lack of trust within the group of enslaved might have meant fewer of them dared to resist their enslavement. We can, however, not rule out the possibility that the risk of apprehension was associated with the size of the establishment. A master might have been more able to surveil a small number of enslaved persons, and detect any crimes. In addition, we cannot rule out that large-scale planters made use of their prerogative to punish enslaved persons themselves, rather than report petty crimes to the colonial authorities, to a greater extent than the small-scale slave-

³⁸ See for example Stefano Fenoaltea, “Slavery and Supervision in Comparative Perspective: A Model,” *The Journal of Economic History* 44, no. 3 (1984): 635–68.

masters did. In all, we interpret the evidence as *tentatively supporting* hypothesis H2b, that resistance against slavery was more common on small-scale establishments, but with the caveat that the estimates of the probability of having been punished for a crime might be biased in relation to the probability of having committed acts of resistance.

A third finding of this study is that enslaved men faced a higher probability of having been punished for some crime than enslaved women did. We do, however, not believe that this ought to be interpreted as showing that men necessarily resisted their enslavement to any greater degree than women did. The evidence presented in the second part of the paper, on the character of the criminal acts, instead, leads us to a somewhat different interpretation: enslaved men and women resisted slavery in different ways. Some of this resistance was covert, such as go-slows (by the masters labelled “laziness”). Other forms of resistance could be more confrontational, such as talking back to a master (perhaps labelled as “meddling”), or explicitly refusing to work. From the limited evidence we have, reported in Tables 3 and 4, it seems as if the enslaved men and women used somewhat different methods of resistance: men were more often punished for thefts and robberies, whereas women to a larger extent were punished for crimes related to children or childcaring, as well as for running away. Men whose “moral character” was characterized in negative terms were to a much greater extent characterized in ways we might classify as confrontational (“meddling”) than women, who to a greater extent employed potentially covert tactics (such as go-slows, labelled as “laziness”). This could then explain the gendered nature of punishments: the risk of apprehension would be much greater for confrontational methods of resistance, than if for covert methods of resistance. This would also impact the estimated probability of having been punished for a crime. Our conclusion is therefore that we find a *tentative support* for H3, that there was a gendered difference in the resistance against enslavement. This was, however, possibly not a difference in terms of the probability for resistance *per se*, but in the types of action employed when resisting the oppressive system.

9. Conclusion

In this study, we have attempted to study the everyday resistance that enslaved persons undertook. We have specifically tried to understand what individual and social characteristics made such acts of resistance against slavery more likely. The records do, certainly, only capture the tip of the iceberg of this resistance as many acts of resistance

most probably went unrecorded in the sources employed for this study. We do, however, believe that the source provides a useful indicator both of the types of resistance undertaken officially, and who the agents undertaking this resistance were.

Our results show that the enslaved did not silently acquiesce in this regime of violence and terror, and that resistance was ubiquitous among all groups of enslaved. One core finding is that relative deprivation among the enslaved seems to have played no role: enslaved persons assigned to occupations with a higher status – such as craftsmen – was no less likely to resist their enslavement than those who were assigned to occupations with a lower status (such as field hands). The size of the establishment that they worked on was, however, shown to be a significant factor: acts of resistance were seemingly more common on small establishment. One possible interpretation of this is that enslaved persons living on smaller establishments might have developed a greater degree of trust among themselves, allowing them to dare to undertake acts of resistance to a greater extent than persons living on larger establishments where social ties among the enslaved might have been weaker. Gender, finally, also played a role: but the types of resistance seem to have differed between enslaved men and women. This also had consequences for the likelihood of being detected and punished for these acts.

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