

Recall This Book 182

Daring to Be Free: Slave Marronage and Rebellion with Sudhir
Hazareesingh (George Boulukos, JP)
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John Plotz

Hello and welcome to Recall This Book, where we invite scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems, and events. I'm John Plotz of Brandeis, and today's topic and today's really truly scintillating book under the microscope is Daring to Be Free: Rebellion and resistance of the enslaved in the Atlantic world. Now that's a known topic, perhaps, but to me at least, this book offers a new approach that emphasizes some completely eye-opening approaches or topics: the importance of New World Marronage,---and I think we're going to hear more about Marronage later--the omnipresent influence of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution, and the ways in which agency and autonomy among enslaved persons persisted in the New World by way of religion and by way of rebellion that took many forms, including violent ones, perhaps far more prevalent than we generally recognize. So, joining us today, we're very fortunate to have its author, the distinguished historian Sudhir Hazareesingh of Balliol College, fellow of the British Academy, author of Black Spartacus a superb biography of Toussaint Louverture, and a holder of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean, which is the highest order of merit that the government of Mauritius bestows --and much more that I'm omitting here. So, Sudhir, welcome and thank you so much for agreeing to join us today.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Thank you very much for having me, John. It's a real pleasure.

John Plotz

Okay, so this is your boring everyday host, John, but I'm joined today by special arrangement by express dispensation from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, the professor of English George Belukas, author of the really wonderful book *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in 18th-Century British and American Culture* from Cambridge in 2008, also the editor of a fascinating memoir by an 18th-century stable boy called *Memoirs of the Lives and Life and Travels of Thomas Hammond, 1775 to 1782." George, I think you even had a T shirt of that book at one point, didn't you?

George Boulukos

I did. Yeah, I'm wearing my journal T shirt instead.

John Plotz

Okay, well, I love that T shirt. So, George, thank you so much for joining me. If this isn't an oxymoron, to joining me as a guest host today. So, George, since you're the person who turned me on to this really amazing book, maybe I should start before we get into the general conversation and ask Sudhir to to introduce us to the book by asking if you there's anything you wanted to add to the too brief introduction that I just gave.

George Boulukos

Um, sure. Yeah, I thought you covered themes very well, but I just want to say what made this book so exciting for me. It's incredibly wide-ranging synthetic history of resistance to slavery in the Black Atlantic, and in being that, it fills a very important gap that has been long existing in the historiography. It's one of those books that I've been looking for decades, really, and it never existed until now. So it was it was like quite thrilling that such a book existed. And then once I read it, I thought it really you know knocked it out of the park for doing that, filling that gap brilliantly. I'd say it opens new vistas for a general audience, and you are pointing out a lot of the areas that are underrecognized that it's bringing attention to. But it does that also for specialists in the the field of Atlantic slavery because it's so capacious. I've been excitedly telling fellow workers in this mine about the opening chapter on resistance in Africa, the way that African groups actually liberated slave ships and actually governing groups that had organized resistance to the slave trade, that story is really not well known even for specialists. So I've been telling people about that, and they're really excited, and it it does it in a surprisingly compact and brilliant package. So I think it's just a wonderful book,

John Plotz

Sudhir. We have palavered at you enough. Clearly, the work meant a lot to both of us. But can we just invite you for those who haven't you know yet had a chance to read the book to introduce us to its key claims, maybe what you think of as its crucial interventions? However, you'd like to frame it for us.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Thank you very much, and thank you, George, for that very generous summary of some of the things that struck you about the book. One of the things that surprised me myself when, in fact, I began the research on the book the book prior to this one,

which was about the Haitian Revolution and its principal, one of its principal figures, Toussaint Louverture. One of the things I wanted to do, because I was very new to this topic, was to read something more general about the topic. And then I was just startled to see that actually such a book didn't exist. And I thought, okay, well, that's a bit strange. And then that was one of the things that kept almost haunting me when I did the research on Haiti, was that I sensed in the background that there was a much bigger story. Because when you study the Haitian Revolution closely, you hear the echoes of these much longer, much wider traditions. You know, Louverture, as I tried to describe him, was somebody who was profoundly African, among other things, in some of the ways that he thought about himself and saw the world. Haiti was a good opening, but it was also a revolution that prompted me to look wider and to look further. So, in a sense, this book is a sort of natural sequel to the book that I wrote about the Haitian Revolution. However, when I started, I still had a lot of what I think are preconceptions about what resistance to enslavement means. We've traditionally taken the story of resistance and emancipation to be a story that is framed around the agency, not the agency of the enslaved, but the agency of enlightened liberals, people in the West, very honorable, decent people. But to my mind, their role has been greatly exaggerated, and in fact, their interventions were more often than not, and indeed I would say invariably, their interventions were actually prompted by the resistance of the enslaved themselves. The universal phenomena that I saw, and this was also something that was very striking because, of course, when you think about enslavement, you have to think of multiple settings: British colonies, French colonies, Dutch colonies, Spanish, different parts of the Americas. But yet, there are some basic fundamental patterns that just keep emerging everywhere, and those are the ones that are, in a sense, the patterns that frame the book: resistance during middle passage, marronage, resistance based on culture, insurrections. In other words, once you understand that slavery is a structure or form of oppression, the kind of resistance that it then provokes is pretty much the same, irrespective of whether we're talking about the United States, Dutch Guyana, Argentina, or my native Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

John Plotz

Forgive me, I heard those four categories: resistance during the Middle Passage, forms of cultural resistance, insurrection. But the middle one, Marronage. Can you just say more for naive readers like me who didn't understand the omnipresence of marronage? Can you just lay out a little bit more for us why you know what that phenomenon is and why you see it as sort of omnipresent and crucial, as you put it?

Sudhir Hazareesingh

So marronage is. I mean, the one of the English translations is people who run away, enslaved men and women who ran away, and this was a phenomenon that I also saw was ubiquitous in Africa itself. In other words, from the moment that slave traders and slave raiders went about capturing African men and women in the villages in the African hinterland, off the off typically off the coasts of West and Central Africa. From that moment on, people began to run away, and they ran away individually. They ran away in groups. There are different types of marronage. I mean, in the literature, people distinguish between short term and longer-term marronage, petit and grand marronage. Although another scholar, Sylviane Diouf, makes I think a better distinction between marronage that is closer to enslaved areas and what she calls hinterland marronage. So it can take a variety of forms. Some people run away for relatively brief periods of time and actually return. Others set up these very complex, very sophisticated societies, communities, which in some cases already in Africa last for several centuries. And one of the things that was very surprising to me was to learn that actually these maroon communities were so powerful that the slavers themselves had to negotiate with them. Had to first of all, sometimes they traded with them. Sometimes they engaged in forms of tacit recognition with them. But sometimes they realized that these communities were so powerful that they ran the risk of overrunning the established slave societies, so they made concessions to them. And one of the things I document throughout the book in different settings are the peace treaties that are signed between. Enslavers and different maroon communities. I would define it as one of the earliest and one of the most basic forms of resistance that you see, because when you look at the the Caribbean and the Americas in the 1500s, and when you read the reports of Spanish colonial governors, you see that they're already talking about marronage happening in in the early 1500s.

John Plotz

This is just a literature person's footnote, but I'd love to get your thoughts about this: like like many naive readers, I sort of came to it from the Césaire poem. Let let's let's marroner let's run away, and I thought of it as being named and known only then. And I hear your account, and to me, it opens up this whole world in which, of course, it's a known phenomenon. And I guess my naive question is: Do you think there's a...if false consciousness is the right word, or like a conscious propaganda, like an effacement of it from the history.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

I think it's a fascinating question because, of course, the question, the further question that it invites is who's telling the story. When you ask the question about

the stories that the enslaved told to each other, and this was something that was an eye-opener for me when I read more about about Haiti. You see that actually there is a sort of diachronical tradition of resistance, which is not written down, but but from the 1600s there are people resisting in the exact same locations, which would two centuries later become the epicenter of the Haitian Revolution. So there are people there who are talking to each other, who are building forms of resistance that will later be appealed to by people like Mackandal, and we know from oral tradition that Mackandal didn't just celebrate himself and the people who were resisting the French in the 18th century. He talked about the Amerindians. He talked about the Taino people. There is, I think, a lot of evidence through oral traditions that the enslaved talked to each other about what their ancestors were doing, both in the Americas and back in Africa. However, when you ask the question in terms of European sources and historiography, there it seems to me there is very definitely an elision, and the elision I think, is both one that I think the forgetting happens in multiple dimensions, if you like. Yeah. Part of it is a is a deliberate elimination of a kind of resistance that doesn't fit with the sort of canons of liberal ideas of emancipation, because for the liberal anti-slavery people, who, as I as I say, were good, decent, honorable people, but they could only think of freedom through the lens of their own historical experiences. So for them, being free meant learning Western languages, adopting Christianity. In other words, embracing the values of the Enlightenment, and therefore, to the extent that people conform to those canons of "civilization," then they might be included in this story. But my point is that you know the evidence that I've gathered suggest that actually most of the time most enslaved resisters did not conform to those canons, right? Because what they were celebrating was just a completely different way of being, one which was based on spontaneity, autonomy, celebrated the African religions, celebrated their spiritual connections with nature. These were things that, even with the best of intentions, European reformers just couldn't handle. So they just left them out or treated them as sort of bizarre, almost sort of quirky forms of existence.

John Plotz

One of the things that was so eye-opening to me about this book was the kind of inferential historical work that you do to establish the existence not just of those, you know, beyond Western comprehension patterns of conceptions of freedom, but also a communicative structure whereby people in various parts of the New World were well aware of the marinade that was going on elsewhere. So I'm going to get the details wrong, but the detail about Nat Turner starting his revolt on was it August 12th? I[actually August 22] Like a date that was significant because it was a Haitian date. This just lets us realize a kind of, you know, invisible internet of other

communicative structures that are distinct from the sorts of things that make it into, as you say, like the European historiography.

George Boulukos

There's an amazing book called *Common Wind* about how these communications happened across the Black Atlantic. That's that's cited prominently in this book. And you know, for anyone interested in how this happened, I I think we would both highly recommend reading *Common Wind*. It's also an interesting publishing story. It was a dissertation that remained unpublished for a long time, and finally was published by Verso Books, maybe 15 or 20 years after.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Not not very long ago, in fact. Yes.

George Boulukos

So I had a question about the archives and sources, and I I think this is a good time to ask that because we we've gotten there. I wanted to ask, you know, what were the most challenging forms or moments of resistance to find or to inferentially develop, as John suggested, were there things you would have liked to tantalizing things that you would have liked to be able to discuss more, and that you couldn't? And also, like you might, what were the most kind of exciting discoveries you made about possible sources? You referenced oral histories in present-day Africa, and that was something I didn't know about, and it blew my mind.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Yes, thank you. No, it was that the advantage of telling the story through such a wide panorama was that it allowed me to hope for initially the uncovering of patterns of consistency,. Because once you have these consistent patterns, you can allow yourself not to get too freaked out by the absence of very specific and detailed sources concerning particular episodes or particular moments. Because once you understand that marronage takes three or four basic forms, then in a sense that allows you to to steady yourself, as it were, and so that's the advantage, if you like, of being able to tell the story from the early 1500s to the late 19th century. The primary objective becomes the identification of common patterns, and the patterns, at least I hope so, seem to me to be almost self-evident, and they recur constantly from generation to generation. Oral traditions were an eye-opener for me because up up to this point, I've been very reliant on the use of archives, and I was very fortunate with Toussaint Louverture because he became a French Republican general., he left the French are very chatty, so they left huge amount of writings,

reports, and because he was both an administrator and a military officer, there was just a massive collection of documents,. And I couldn't replicate that in any way with 99% of the people that I was writing with. So what I then and this came to me just sort of intuitively, really. I sort of compared what I was doing to sort of assembling a jigsaw puzzle, right? You have to have a sense of what the big picture is, but it's it's a matter of taking just a tiny amount of information because the amounts of information that you're going to get are always going to be small. But if you collect them and know where to place them, then you can gather slowly. You can build a complex picture. So that was the way in which I sort of proceeded, and it was quite challenging and initially quite frustrating because sometimes I just wasn't sure where a particular piece could or should fit, but that I was able to do that. And then there were the the good surprises, and I'm glad George you mentioned that African oral tradition because that really did blow my mind. Because this is a group of priests who are in in Benin, I think, and who for seven or eight generations have been passing on to each other stories about groups of themselves who had been captured into slavery, and not only were their names remembered, but also their occupations. So you have a kind of record of about 7 or 8000 people who whose names and occupations were preserved until the until the early 21st century, and so what that made me realize, if I had had the time, of course, is that it would be very much worthwhile picking up on these oral traditions because they still they still exist. If you go to certain parts of the American South. Can still talk to people who whose great grandparents experienced slavery in the 19th century. So, oral history played a really important role in the way that I was able to approach this this story.

John Plotz

George, I know you had a version of this question about the Vince Brown article that you want to jump in with that that's great because I think this is a good connection to the sort of critical fabulation question....

George Boulukos

Yeah that so this might be a more annoying question than the other one I was I wanted to bring up the kind of good deal of debate that there has been recently about how possible it is to recover the experiences of the enslaved from the master's archive. I'd say you engage with this issue a great deal not as a historiographical question but just because this is what you're doing right you're you're looking for this these experiences, yeah, like you insist on the importance of women and uprisings on slave ships and in organized rebellions, and you you bring in that great Vincent Brown essay on the question of social death. Do you find yourself sympathetic with his implication that the archive, however, biased the master's

archive (even because we've been talking about other resources that get you outside of that, which is incredible. And what you were just saying about the generations, how long this story has been preserved, is I just want to pause and say how amazing that is, and and you know we really need to be paying more attention to these resources, like you're saying about people in in the American South have these stories and they haven't necessarily been collected as they could be.) I'm wondering, do you fall on the side that Brown seems to take that there's always room to find something, even if it is perhaps unsatisfying? Or are you sympathetic with the kind of pessimistic view that we should realize just how limited our access really is?

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Thank you. No, it's an absolutely fundamental question, and and I appreciate how agonized the debates have been, particularly in the States. I end up certainly much less on the pessimistic side because I think the first our first duty as historians is to look at all the evidence that is available to us, particularly on a subject like slavery, where almost from the outset there is a huge disparity between what is available to us from written from a slaver's perspective, which I would say constitutes probably 95%. If I had to put a number on it, 95% of the available sources, I think it's

John Plotz

good to keep 19 to one in mind as a ratio. Yes, I'm going to recall that. Yeah,

Sudhir Hazareesingh

and the other 5% is what we would, and even that is not pure necessarily, right? It'll be a record taken down by a white person of what somebody who had resisted had done. There's very little that is purely, completely uncontaminated. So, first off, I just think it's a rather bad research strategy to start by saying I'm going to cast away 95% of the material. Right? If you really think that, you should go and work on something else is my first response. But secondly, there is actually a lot of "objective" material in the slavers' archives. When you watch Skip Gates finding your roots, what does he use as his prime material? It's the records kept by the slavers, right? I mean that's his starting point, and then from that basis he tries to reconstruct whatever information might be available from other sources. And I'm always startled, and the descendants that he talks to are always startled, by how much he's then able to find from that initial very meager source. Sometimes, as you know very well, there isn't even a name, right? There is just an entry, and that's what we have, right? But if you take the the question of resistance, and if you look at say the platform called Slave Voyages, you have no information at all about the individuals who carried out these acts of rebellion, but what you have are objective,

or at least as objective as they could be, in terms of identifying the the number of such revolts. You have a lot of information about how many of these revolts were carried out, how many of them. Were successful, so I think that kind of information one should definitely be not just able to use, but I think it's absolutely indispensable for our understanding of of at least our attempt to reconstruct the mental universe of of enslaved people.

George Boulukos

I think when you're discussing those figures, you do you have some skepticism that we we're getting a complete picture, but it gives you a basis to kind of extrapolate, you know, if we are recorded, how many more are there, and you know, in different national traditions, there are different numbers of records. So you, I remember you're saying like the French have very poor records about this, but we we should believe it's a similar ratio, you know, of voyages to uprisings....

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Exactly.. One of the other things is what type of document you're dealing with, and I think having enough sensitivity to the range of documents that you are confronted with is also very important because more and more now people are turning to court documents as a source, and I think there there are some very interesting questions that are raised and which which in a way support both sides of the argument possibly because I became very interested in the very few actual revolts in in my native island of Mauritius. There was one big attempt in I think 1823, and there was a massive inquiry carried out, quasii-judicial inquiry, 700 pages I found in the National Archives, and when you sift through it all, you realize that the poor witnesses have been coerced, and so you can't really necessarily take what they're saying at face value. As against that, I read a wonderful book by actually a compatriot, a Mauritian who teaches in the United States and who and who went through court records in Louisiana, and she found that actually a lot of what the enslaved, particularly the women, were saying [there] were just transcribed, and the documents were just there, in in a sense, reproducing almost their sort of stream of consciousness. And once you read through that, you actually find a lot of interesting material because, in a sense, the the the court weren't interested in silencing her, right? In fact, they were barely interested in listening, right? Bu the stenographer was doing his job. He just wrote everything down, and when you have a document like that, it's very different from a witness who's being treated as part of a case, a hostile case that's being constructed against someone. So even in in these very repressive settings, you can sometimes find authentic and strong voices coming through.

George Boulukos

Okay, I'm just going to go into a specific theme in the book that I'd like to hear you just comment on more, which is the correlation between religious belief and organized resistance that that kept coming up, and it was kind of a insistent correlation in the book. But I don't know that you pulled back and commented on why you know why that might be. Maybe you don't want to, but but I was wondering if you if you were interested in talking about that, there are obvious possibilities and you touch on some of these shared religious practices, also are organizing opportunities, right? And you say at times they could be like also a kind of cover, a cover for doing things the master might not like. I said, and you know of course religious beliefs could provide a framework that would justify resistance you know possibly by the way a religion defines the value of the self right things like that of course then there's another issue which is some religions will frame violent action very negatively, and you know, make it quite difficult to justify violence. So, and of course, the in the Christianity preached by the master, that was a major theme, right? So, I don't know. Would you are are you interested in kind of talking a bit about the the kind of the reason that you seem so interested in religion and its correlations to to resistance? There's a a second element to it, which is obeah, which is fascinating. And you document at times that masters really believed in its power. And I and there are sort of tantalizing references, but it's not a topic that you're diving into. So I was wondering if if you'd also like to comment on that. Those are a little disparate but connected.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Absolutely. Thank you, because the religious angle is one that emerged through my research. I hadn't been expecting to find so much of it, and that was an eye-opener for me. And I should say, perhaps as somebody who came from a historiography, a historiographical tradition that was rooted in thinking about this through Enlightenment or Marxism. I mean, I like everybody. I read the Black Jacobins and you know, and Cesaire, and of course that sort of way of thinking about resistance is grounded in an approach of the self, which leaves religion far away. And in fact, you know, both Cesaire and C.L.R. James, for both of them, Africa is the big sort of unspoken thing. It's sort of so massive that they can't really deal with it. And one of the difficulties is that I think they're both conscious that religion can be a source of political activity too, but it doesn't fit with that kind of rationalist way of thinking about agency. So, for a long time, you know, the only people who were interested in religion were people who came from a a completely different political and historiographical tradition. So I think I think one of the interesting things by the

time you get to the 1800s is that actually resistance is being irrigated by many different sources, right? And I'm not I'm certainly not wanting to say that the sort of Western rationalist tradition is not important. There are moments, there are particular episodes where it plays a big role, and it does play a role of some kind, of some significance in the Haitian Revolution. But what I saw, looking at all these different instances, is that certainly in the earlier, in the 1500, 1600, 1700s, in almost every instance, African religions, African natural religions, are playing a very important role. And what becomes interesting--and you hinted at it in your question, George--is that once people are converted to Catholicism, they then use Catholicism as a vehicle. And in fact, they're very clever at disguising the subversive elements that they then attribute to Catholicism. There's a sort of overt slavery Catholicism, and then there's the hidden one, which sometimes they physically go and practice in a separate place. Right. So there's a lot of hide and seeking going on in these forms of resistance. And one of the things that I just found so fascinating was that the slavers, for a very very long time, just didn't see this coming. For them, religion was a good thing because they thought religion would teach the enslaved to be docile and to accept their fate, and it was far too late in most cases when they realized that didn't happen. But it's a very very consistent pattern that I see across all the different types of slave revolt, whether it involves vodun in Haiti, Christianity in the United States, or Islam in Brazil. Right. I go back to that point I made earlier on at the beginning, which is that this is about resisting a structure of domination. So, once you're in a structure of domination, you use whatever material is available to you to resist that domination, and if it happens to be Islam, as was the case in Brazil, then that's what you draw on.

John Plotz

Can I ask a follow up about this, as relates to your discussion of marronage earlier, but also the presence of Haiti in the cultural imaginary. I was really struck by your account just in our conversation about seeing recurrent patterns that do emerge. You know, given structural constraints being such as they are, you would expect certain patterns to emerge, and I understand that as a key theme of the book, but it also seems that a key theme of the book is about transmission and perpetuation as well. That is, it's not just that given this situation people will rise up; it's also that people have a referent, which, as you use the wonderful word elision, like it's been elided from a conventional European history. But it exists in a sub rosa way. Can you say more about how you see those things coexisting? That is the structural constraints that mean that these things are going to happen again and again, and the genealogical information flow that says people are going to have Haiti, are going to have facts of marronage elsewhere to turn to for inspiration or advice, say

Sudhir Hazareesingh

it's absolutely fascinating. And I think what it underlines to me, and this is where I would have loved to have had better written sources, because of course these are things you can just deduce or hint at when you're writing a book like this, is that there were almost two separate ways of being for the enslaved. One was the way in which they interacted with the dominant society, which was oppressing them, where they had to give, as it were, ostensible signs of conformity. But around that, in the interstices of that, and sometimes literally kind of beneath that, they're they're leading different existences, where they're talking to each other in sometimes in a different language, the language that the slaver can't understand. They are praying to gods or appealing to gods that the slavers don't approve of, they're engaging in forms of physical activity that the slavers don't accept, like maroonage or or forms of trade, and that's that's why this concept of autonomy to me is so important. These are people who often are not able to be free in the sense that we would understand it today because they're not emancipated, but I think even in servitude, so many of the enslaved were able to find pockets of freedom, which they were able to create for themselves, almost like insulate themselves from the slaver society, and sometimes the insulation would be purely spiritual. Sometimes it would be physical. Sometimes it would be a combination of the two. But that's that's the way in which resistance operated, and of course it took a variety of forms. But that that is what allowed these practices to to replicate over time because I think it was almost consistent with the fundamental way of being of all enslaved people, right? Because the the correlation of power was so weighted against you, part of you had to conform to To what you were facing, but that didn't mean you were necessarily broken or passive or accepted that that existence. There were so many other ways, subtle ways, that you could lead a life where you were at least able to make some choices, and that's why I think this notion of autonomy actually captures a lot in terms of how we think about these people's existences.

George Boulukos

That was something I really loved in the book. That you never forget what the enslaved are up against, and the the terrible the terrible truth of the matter. You know, you're finding these better stories, and the stories about people making claims for their autonomy, but you're not forgetting the context in which it happens. This whole discussion is making me think: we started off saying I started off saying this was a book I've been looking for decades, and when you were trying to research Haiti, you were looking for this kind of book, and it didn't exist. And you were you were surprised. Is it is it maybe the case that it was only possible to write such a

book quite recently? You we've talked about how the the question has been framed so much through the vast majority of the history of the historiography of these questions through the agency o of the enlightened European, the you know the the French philosophers and the English abolitionists, white abolitionists being the kind of protagonists of the story.

John Plotz

I just want to echo that and say that in that context, your account of Wilberforce was really eye-opening for me. I hadn't realized the limitations in the Wilberforcean movement, and you bring that out so beautifully within what? Yeah, I mean, George, I think you have a question about kind of like the consolidation of whiteness in in Europe in the 19th century, and and surely Wilberforce exists inside that consolidated whiteness in ways that I hadn't really grasped.

George Boulukos

What do you think? Is this sort of has the historiography moved in a direction where this finally became possible just recently? And and is that why such a book maybe didn't really exist before?

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Yes, that's a very interesting way of thinking about it. I think I think once we started to be more reflexive about in the way that we think about freedom, and take a more genealogical approach to how ideas about freedom came together, then I think we've come to a realization that actually this is something that has been socially constructed by certain groups of people at certain moments in time, and that these stories are stories that have power embedded in them, sometimes deliberately, Sometimes implicitly, and that therefore these stories, until recently, were about manifestations of, if you like, counter forms of power. Right. So we had to work our way through our understanding of that until so that we could then realize that actually those those narratives were including some people but also excluding others, and it's once we've come to the realization that these groups have been excluded. I mean, we haven't talked about women yet, and in a way that that's almost that's almost been a sort of typical feature of the way this story has been constructed. That resistance was always thought of as something very masculine, very virile, and it's only thanks to the scholarship of feminist historians and historians of women over the last few decades that we're now starting to see, and this very struck me very forcefully when you look at the American examples, that actually so many of these these stories depend or these moments depend for their organization on crucial intelligence that is brought by women. I mean, the same is

true of slave ship revolts, right? Of course, the often, I mean, there are more more men than women on board these ships, but almost invariably, these revolts could not have happened without intelligence and sometimes actual weapons being brought below deck by groups of women who had relatively more freedom on board and were therefore able to play a role, play a decisive role in making those revolts possible. So I think once we've started to think about history as stories of inclusion and exclusion, it's become easier to tell the story in this particular way.

John Plotz

Yeah, you know, I read George a lecture in advance about. I said, George, you're not supposed to quiz Sudhir about his politics. You were just supposed to get at like the substance of what you're discussing. But I think this is a brilliant way of getting at that question of what has changed? I mean, what's like that point about a kind of Foucauldian point about a genealogy of what we're able to see? How do we get outside of older paradigms? Yeah, that's great.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

And at the same time, of course, because some of the things that are frustrating about this present moment is that alongside the effort that we're making just to try and find out what happened, we're having to deal with people who are trying to tell us that they don't want to hear this story. Right? That that part of the conversation is annoying. The sort of noise element is frustrating, and and you know so you now have to almost sort of justify. I mean, in in the British context, you have to justify making the connection between Britishness today and the colonial past of the British Empire, because people say, well, no, we're not really interested in finding out further, finding out more about that story. It's a battle that that never stops.

John Plotz

Yeah. Well, I appreciate you framing it as tuning out the noise. It's sometimes very hard to tune out that noise in the States these days. So, Sudhir, this has been great, and I think what remains now, as George suggested, is basically just take the turn towards home, which is to bring up our topic, our signature topic of Recallable Books. So, if people enjoyed this discussion, is there a book you would point them towards? Something that you think they might also enjoy reading, and maybe to George, can I start with you to give Sudhir a moment to think about

George Boulukos

Julia Scott's *Common Wind* I mentioned that in our discussion, and I think I would very highly recommend that. I think it does a really great job of taking a different

angle and showing you something you don't expect to see. To see how, and this is a point that is very important. Also to this book, how do the enslaved form networks of communication and keep information and traditions alive? And it does a really brilliant job of mapping that out for you. This is a little bit of a curveball, but there's a couple of graphic novels that touch on elements of things we've discussed. Rebecca Ferguson has a book called *Wake*, which is a graphic novel about her work as a researcher into the role of women in slave revolts, and it's a short graphic novel, but it really communicates the kind of structural problems that have been put up for finding this information. There's also a wonderful Brazilian graphic novelist who's in a series of books about Brazilian experiences of slavery, including one called *Angola Johnz*, which is about the what's it called *Colombos*, I think, in Brazil that Sudhir discusses the kind of maroon communities that become very powerful and very structured.

John Plotz

I was going to mention Richard Price's *First Time*, the historical vision of an African American people, which I feel like is an amazing. It's a Suriname version of that, like how stories get preserved. Yeah, the

George Boulukos

Price is all over here, footnotes too.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

I learned a huge amount from him.

George Boulukos

this graphic novelist De Salite, I think his name is. It's published by Fantagraphics. He has three or four that have been translated in English, but I'd say *Angola Johnz* is really fascinating for giving you a view of that Brazilian Quilombo

Sudhir Hazareesingh

of. is that *Palmares*? Yes,

George Boulukos

I think it is.

Sudhir Hazareesingh

Yes, yes, fantastic.

John Plotz

Great. Those will be linked in the show notes. S

Sudhir Hazareesingh

For me, there's one one kind of overriding one, which is the book that I first read when I began my journey into this whole wonderful world, and this is C.L.R. James's *Black Jacobins*, which is a story. To Toussaint Louverture is in the subtitle, but it's it's really a story of the interconnection between the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution, and it's just told with a wonderful elan. It's very stylish, and it's the kind of historical writing where you feel that you're present, and you're and you're watching and you're hearing these sounds. You're accompanying the actors on the on their extraordinary journey. It's a wonderfully exhilarating piece of historical writing, and and C.L.R. James just writes in this marvelously terse but dramatic style. It's just a book, even if you're not interested in the French Revolution or the Haitian Revolution. Yeah. But just as a story, it's just absolutely brilliant. So that would be my my my number one recommendation.

John Plotz

I think you've just elevated it to our status of Booker of Bookers because I think that's the third time someone has mentioned it!

Sudhir Hazareesingh

iFantastic.

John Plotz

Yeah, it's fantastic. And I was actually going to mention a book that you that I learned about from your book, Sudhir, which is the Neil Roberts "*Freedom as Marronage*," which is amazing, very conceptually rich, difficult, philosophically dense, but such a wonderful way of thinking about the applicability of the *Marinage* concept to, as you were alluding to, the kind of genealogical complexity of how freedom comes into being in a slave situation. Freedom as a concept gets defined and hardened by a slave society, so yeah, really wonderful. Okay, well, all that remains is for me to thank both of you and to say again, the book is called "*Daring to Be Free: Rebellion and Resistance of the Enslaved in the Atlantic World*." If you're listening in France, it just came out in French translation. I see "*Ose d'Etre Libre*," I think is it's called in French. Sudhir, thank you so much, and George, thanks for being my guest host. It's great. Thank you.

George Boulukos

It was a thrill. I'm so glad I got to talk to you, Sudhir. And I, I'm honored to be on your podcast, John. We should also make sure to put *Black Spartacus* in the recommendations, which was a wonderful, wonderful book.

John Plotz

Yes, definitely, we will for sure. Okay, so thank you all for listening, and yep, from all of us here at Recall This Book, goodbye for now. Recall This Book is the creation of John Plotz and Elizabeth Ferry. Sound editing is by Nawal Irfani, and music comes from a song by Eric Chasalow and Barbara Cassidy. We gratefully acknowledge support from Brandeis University and its Mandel Center for the Humanities. We always want to hear from you, our listeners, with your comments, criticisms, or suggestions for future episodes. Finally, if you enjoyed today's show, please forward it to five people, write a review and rate us wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening.