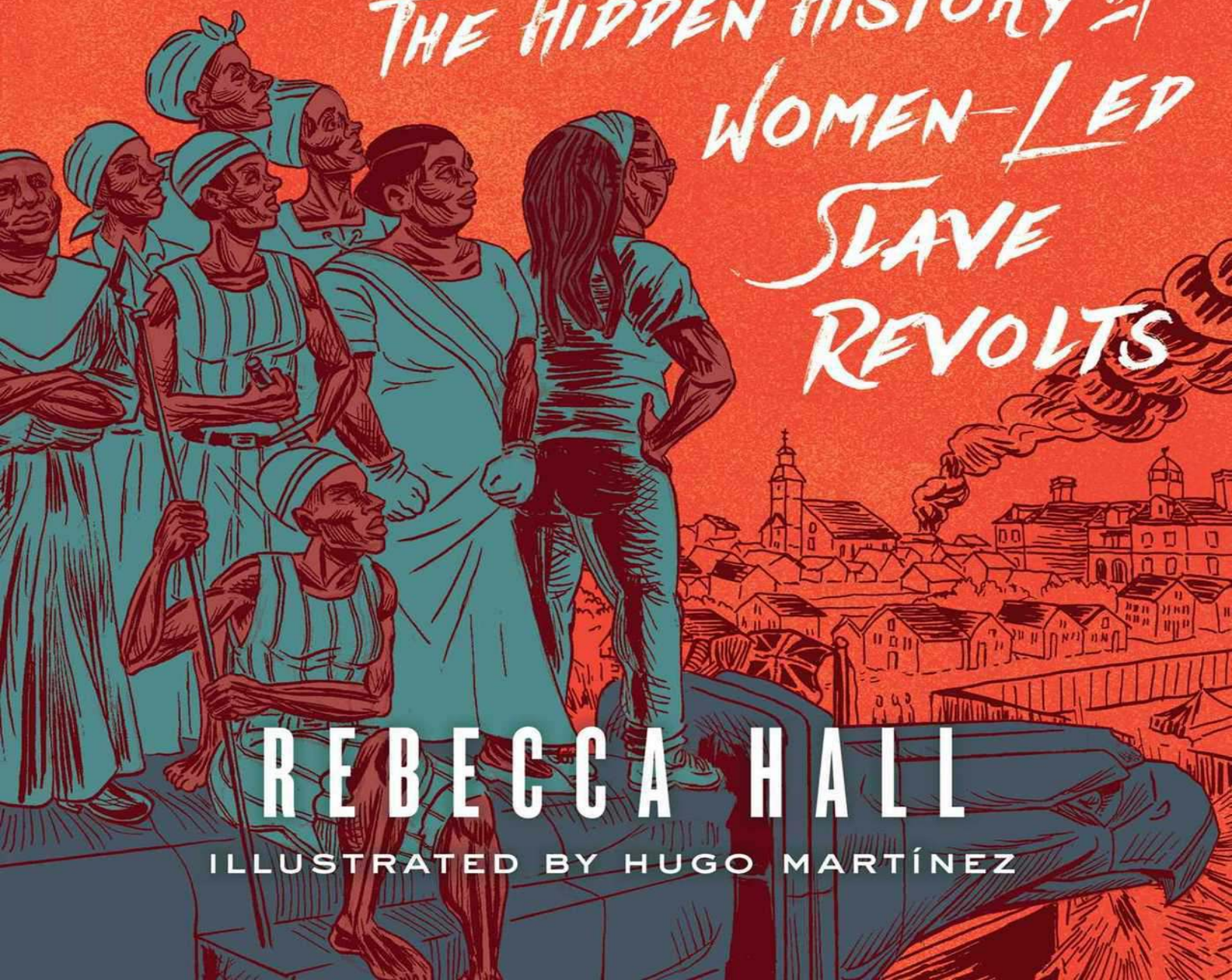


"With its remarkable blend of passion and fact, action and reflection,
Wake sets a new standard for illustrating history." —**NPR**

WAKE

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF WOMEN-LED SLAVE REVOLTS



REBECCA HALL

ILLUSTRATED BY HUGO MARTÍNEZ





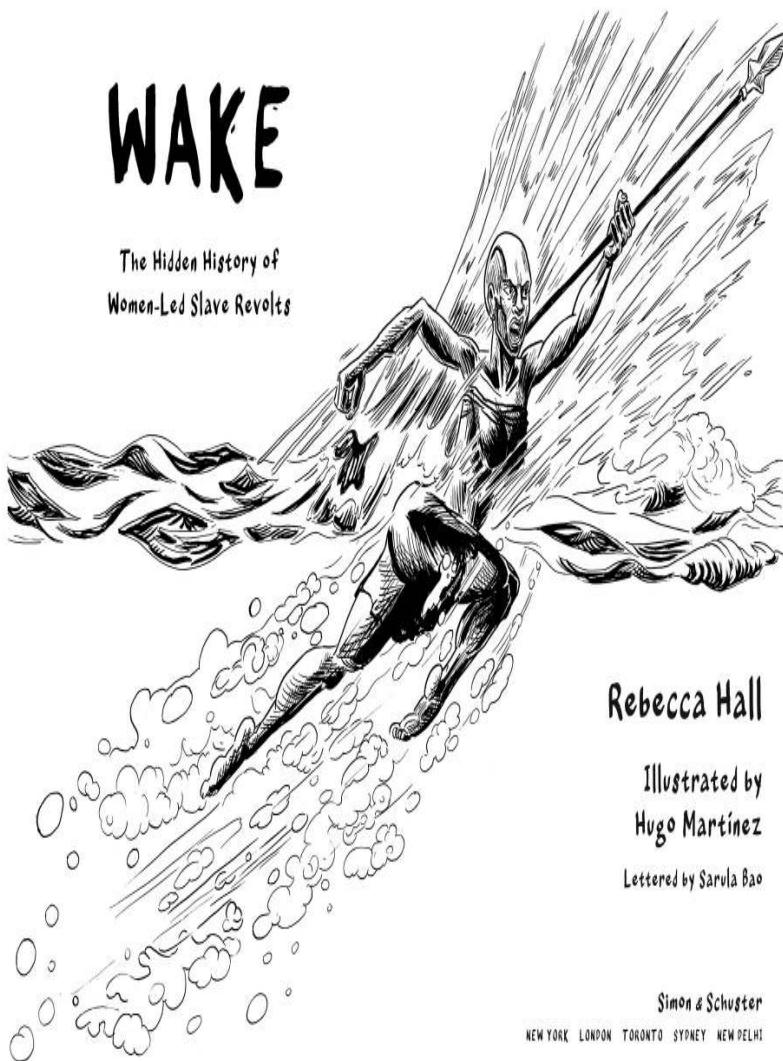






WAKE

The Hidden History of
Women-Led Slave Revolts



Rebecca Hall

Illustrated by
Hugo Martínez

Lettered by Sarula Bao

Simon & Schuster

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI



Simon & Schuster
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 2021 by Rebecca Hall and Hugo Martinez

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book
or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information,
address Simon & Schuster Secondary Rights Department,
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition June 2021

SIMON & SCHUSTER and colophon are trademarks
of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

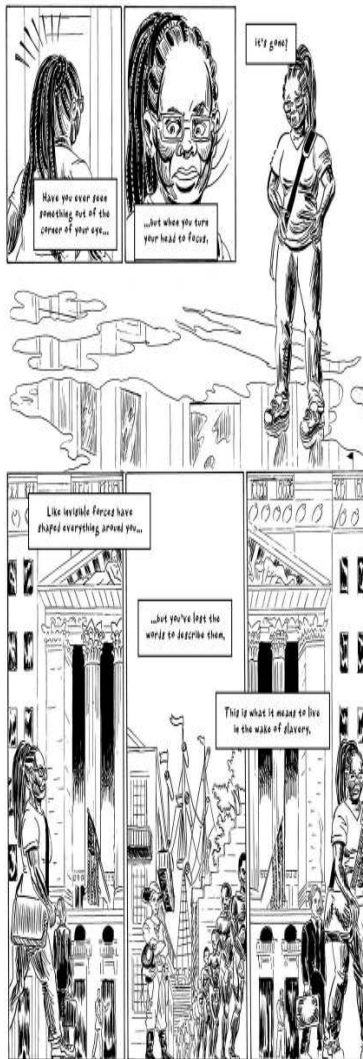
For information about special discounts for bulk purchases,
please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-866-506-1949
or business@simonandschuster.com.

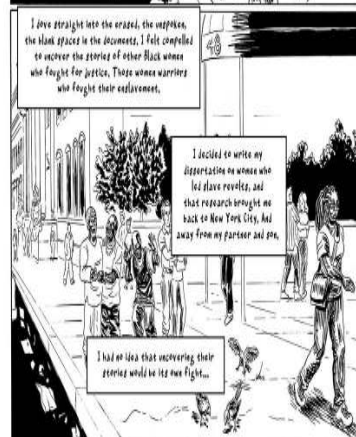
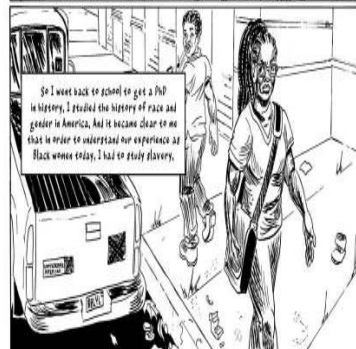
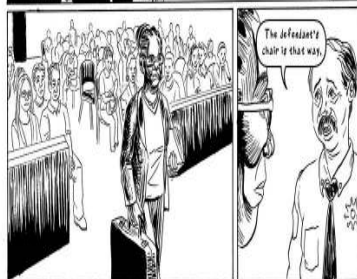
The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your
live event. For more information or to book an event, contact the
Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at 1-866-246-3049
or visit our website at www.simspeakers.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-5621-516-0
ISBN 978-1-5621-520-3 (eBook)









Chapter 2

Dom Regina vs. Negro Slaves

History written by the victors
always erases resistance. And those
of us who live in the wake / ring learn
that we were inferior and needed
to be conquered and enslaved. This is
the afterlife of slavery that the
victors need us to inhabit. One in which
we have always already lost and have
accepted our fate as handed to us.

But we always resisted slavery.
Our constant resistance was central
to bringing about slavery's end.

I came here not only to recover
the history of this resistance,
but also to specifically find the
women whose stories had been
written out of slave revolts.

NEW YORK CITY, 1999 / 1912

After reading every scrap of every story
about slave revolts, I came across ones that included
women, but only if I read between the lines.



There was a slave revolt in New York City in 1712.
The few history books in which it is discussed
describe the participants as a group of men.

In that year, Robert Hunter, the colonial
governor of New York, wrote to the
Lord of Trade back in England,

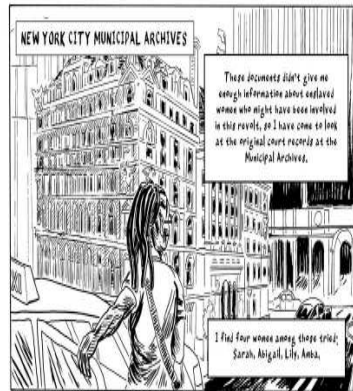
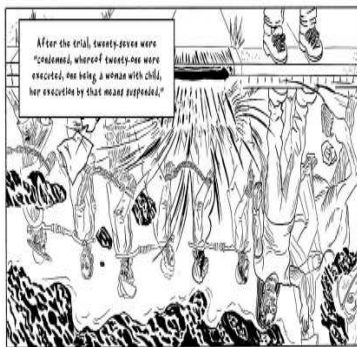
He told them about "A bloody conspiracy of
some of the slaves of this place to destroy
as many inhabitants as they could."

They did this, he explained, to avenge themselves for
"some hard usage they apprehended to have received
from their masters, (for I can find no other cause)."

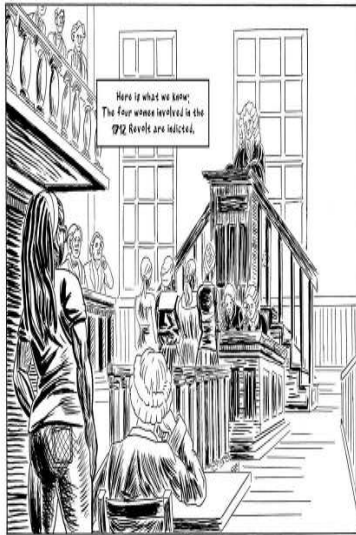
"Tying themselves to secrecy by picking
up stones of each other's hands," they
planned a revolt, which took place in April.

They burned down a building and then shot the white people
who came to extinguish the fire, and then fled. The governor
called on the militia to "drive the rebels" and claimed to the
Lord that "we found all that got the design in execution, six
of these having first laid violent hands upon themselves."







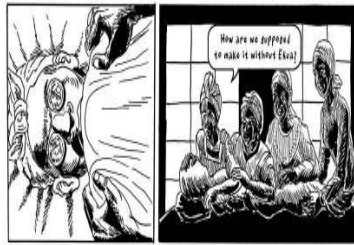


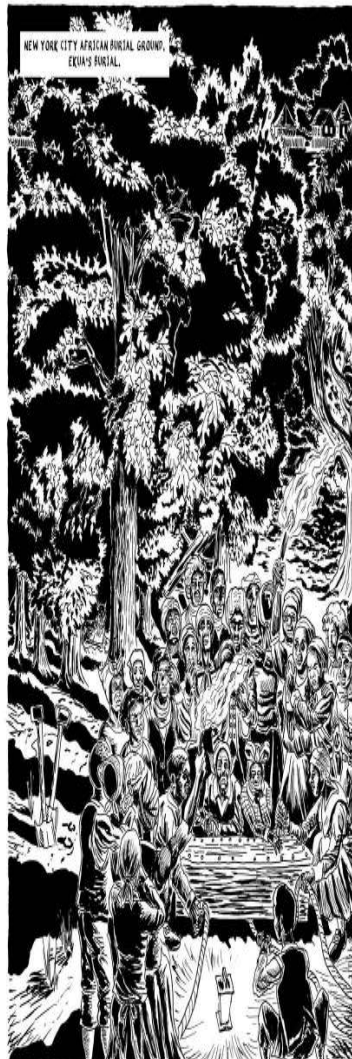


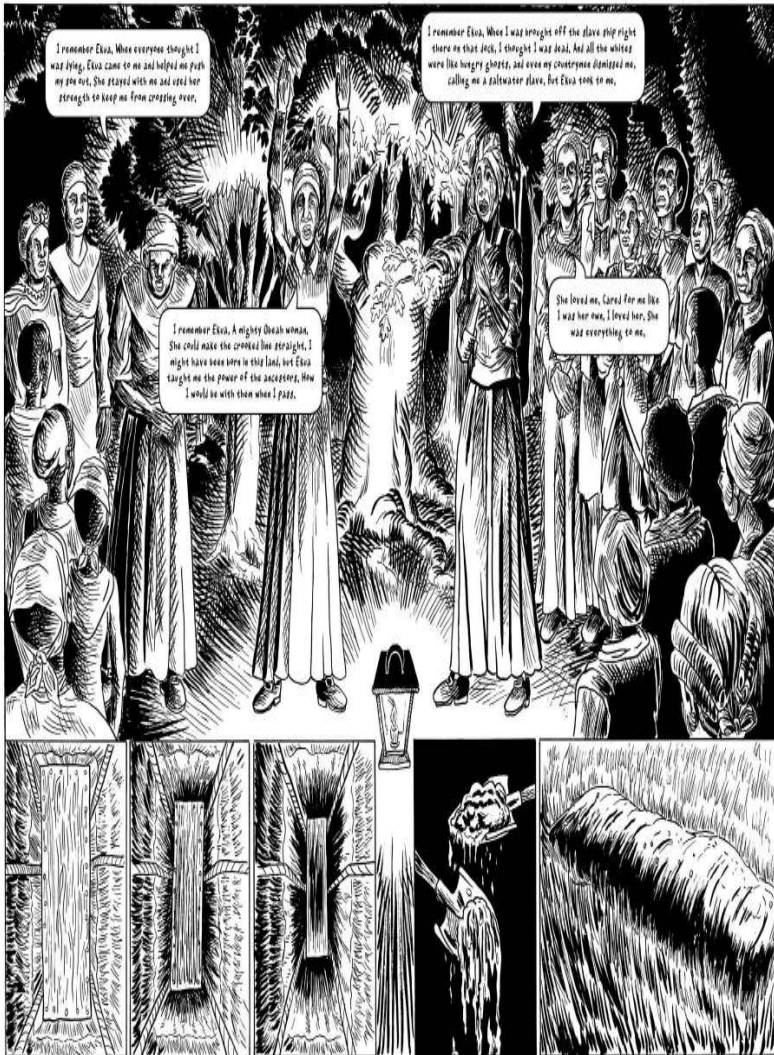
Chapter 3
Some Hard Usage

NEW YORK, 1912







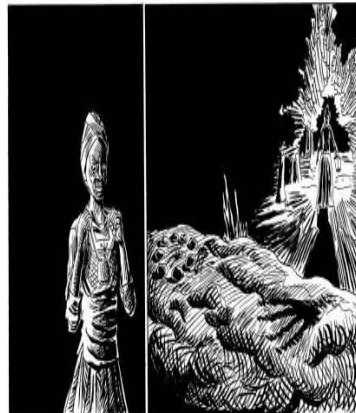


I remember Eliza, When everyone thought I was dying, Eliza came to me and helped me push my pin out, She stayed with me and used her strength to keep me from crossing over,

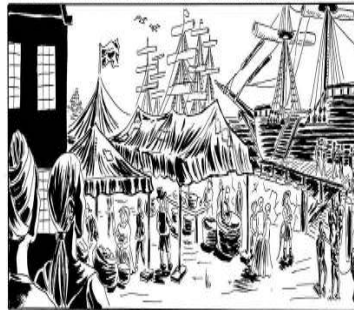
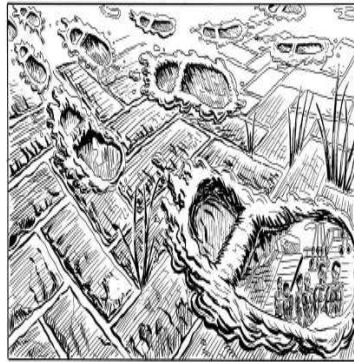
I remember Eliza, When I was brought off the slave ship right there on that dock, I thought I was dead, but all the whites were like hungry ghosts, and even my countrymen dismissed me, calling me a saltwater slave, but Eliza took to me,

I remember Eliza, A mighty Obeah woman, She could make the crooked line straight, I might have been here in this land, but Eliza taught me the power of the ancestors, Now I would be with them when I pass,

She loved me, Cared for me like I was her own, I loved her, She was everything to me,



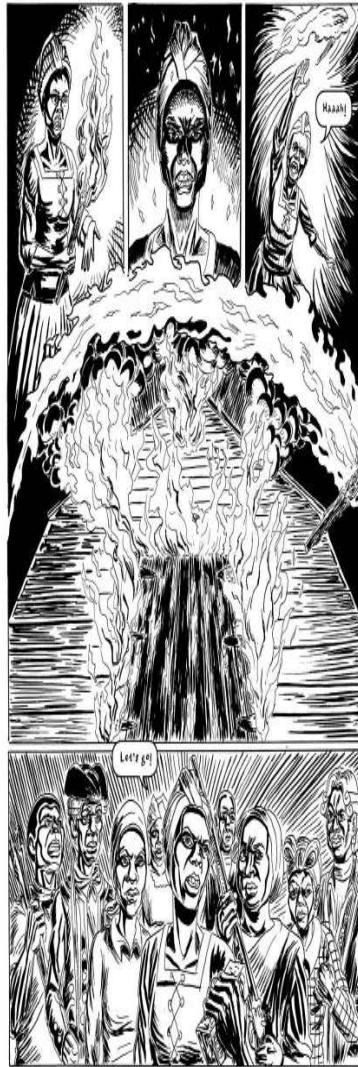




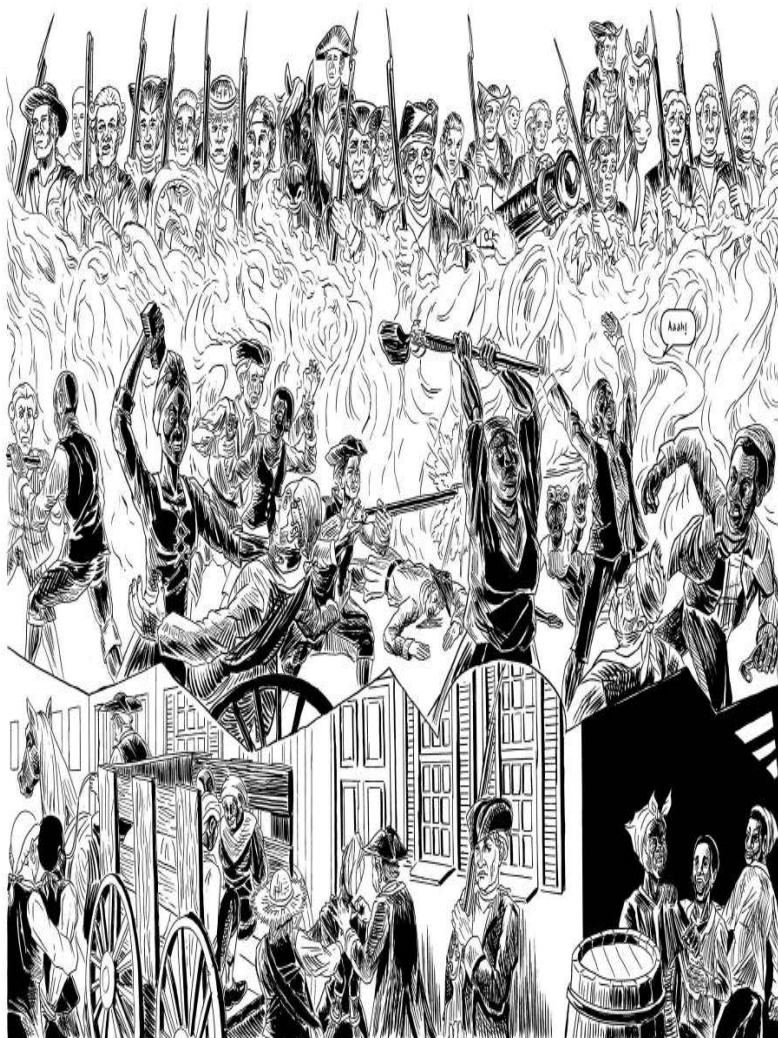


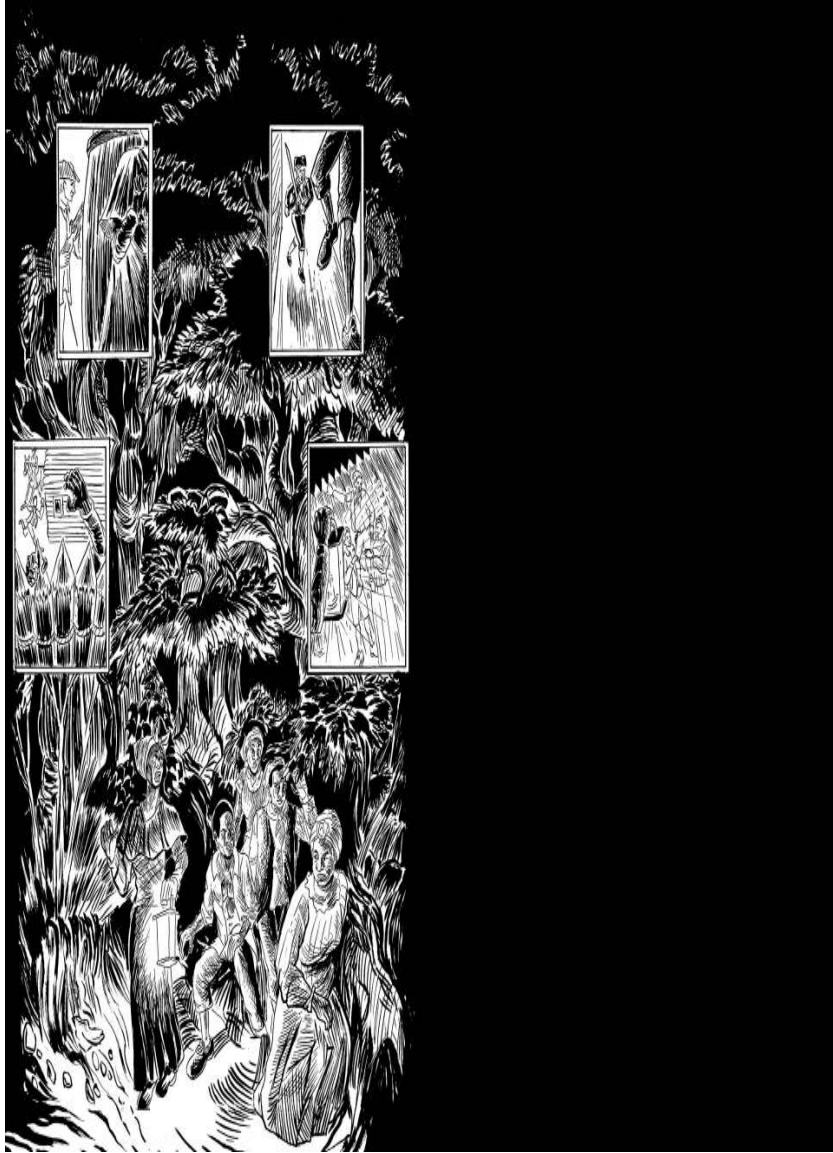












New York governor's letter to Don Regina

June 23, 1712

*We found all that put the design into execution, six of these
having first laid violent hands upon themselves, the rest
forthwith brought to trial before ye Justices of this place . . .*

*Twenty-seven condemned, whereof twenty-one
were executed, one being a woman with child,
her execution by that means suspended . . .*

*Some were burnt others hanged, one broke on the wheele,
and one hung a live in chains in the town, so that
there has been the most exemplary punishment inflicted
that can possibly be thought of . . .*

Amb, time to
come home,





Chapter 4
Sarah or Abigail

We know from court records that after the verdict, Sarah and Abigail were both sentenced to death.

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 2000

The pregnant woman had her execution delayed until after the given birth because that baby was someone's property.

Let which one was pregnant!

Sarah or Abigail?



In researching the answer to that question, I plunged into a historian's worst nightmare—especially when she is trying to write the history of enslaved women.

I must read the documents against the grain.

assuming there are any documents to be found at all.

Governor Hunter asks the queen for pardons for the slaves he imprisoned.

No explains that enough had been executed, "more have suffered than we can find were active in this bloody affair."

Hunter writes: "I beg you will procure Her Majesty's pleasure to be signified to me for their pardon, for they lie now in prison at their master's charge."

To find the answer, I need to review the correspondence between New York's colonial governor, Robert Hunter, and the Don Diego's Lords of Trade.

The letters traveled back and forth by ship, between New York and England, taking weeks or months in each direction.

A reprieve is temporary. Only the queen had the power to issue a pardon here.

In March 1713, almost a year after the trials, Hunter writes the Lords of Trade, reminding them of the slaves waiting execution, and says, "I have not had the honor of your Lordship's commands since last Fall."

I find a letter from the secretary of the Lords of Trade dated April 23, 1713, saying that as soon as we "know Her Majesty's pleasure" regarding the other pardons, Hunter will be informed.



Hunter, a year and a half later, having still heard nothing, writes again, reminding them of the woman who is still being held.

"There is likewise a Negro woman who was seized prior to the conspiracy but pleading her belly, was reprieved, she is since delivered, but in wretched condition ever since, and I think has suffered more than death by her long imprisonment. If their Lords think fit to include her, I should be pleased, for there has been much blood shed already on that account. I'm afraid too much, and the people are now easy."

During that time, no one was meant to stay in jail for more than a few days. The punishment was inflicted on the only itself—branding, amputation, execution—not by serving a prison sentence. These jails, or "goals," were miserable places; exposed, cold, hard surfaces filled with excrement and vermin.

Ultimately, the fate of Sarah or Abigail goes lost in political upheaval. Hunter doesn't hear from the secretary until June 22, 1775, over three years after he first petitioned the queen.

Queen Anne has died and been succeeded by the incompetent King George. "His principal amusement, after frolics covering with his mistresses, was to have cutting paper into pretty patterns."

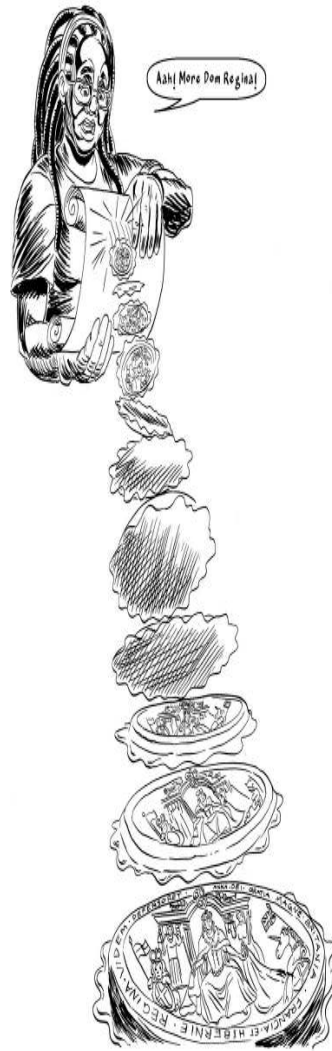
Now, three years after the revolt, and Sarah or Abigail is still in jail.

I review every letter between them for the next five years, until Governor Hunter is recalled to England in 1773. There is no mention of a pardon.

Was it possible that Sarah or Abigail could have still been alive in jail eight years after the revolt?

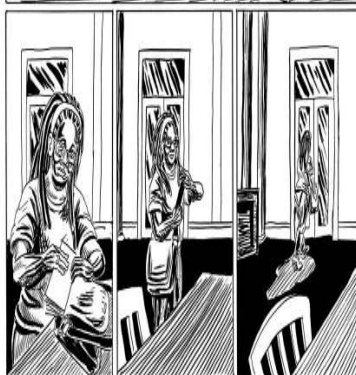
Could Hunter have just let her go?

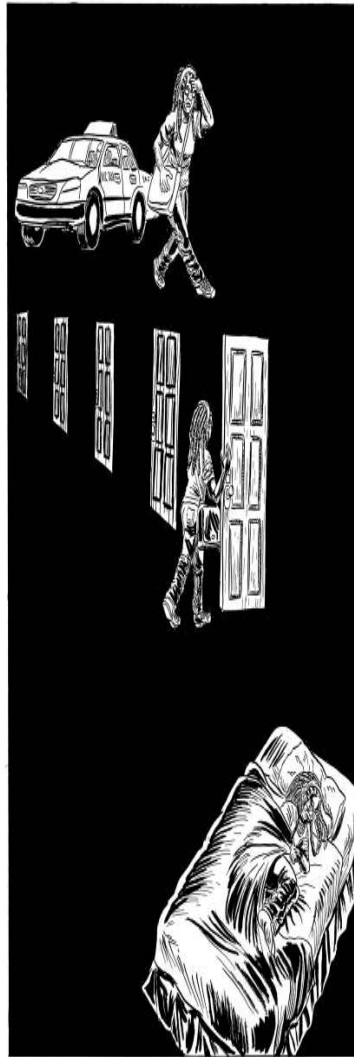
Or did he order her execution before he returned to England?





I can't find her, I'll never know what happened to Sarah or Nigel.





Chapter 5

The Search for the Negro Fiend

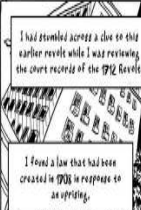
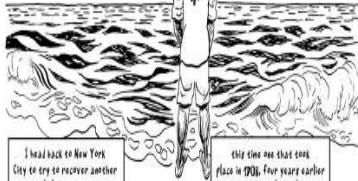
SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA, 2000

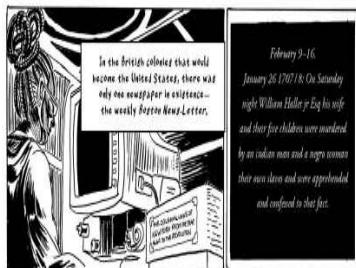
Before I continue my quest to
research these people, I take
a much-needed break with my
family to restore my energy.

As Andre Leroie said:
"Loving for myself is not
self-indulgence, it is self-
preservation, and that is an
act of political warfare."

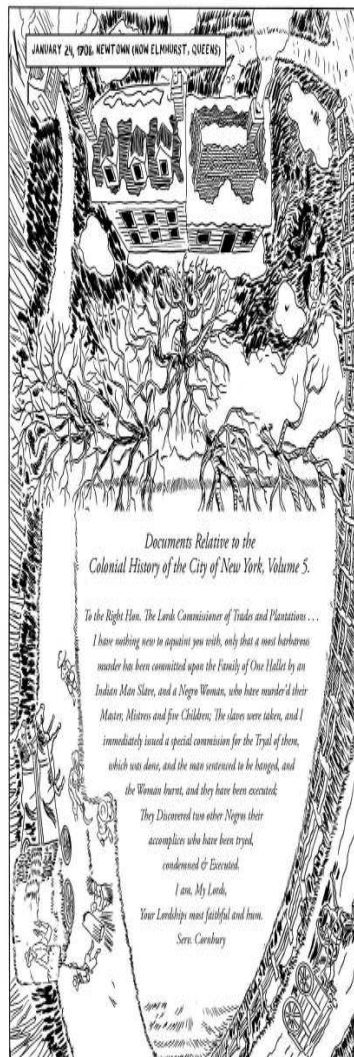
Ugh, he'd eat all
the sand on this
beach if we let him.



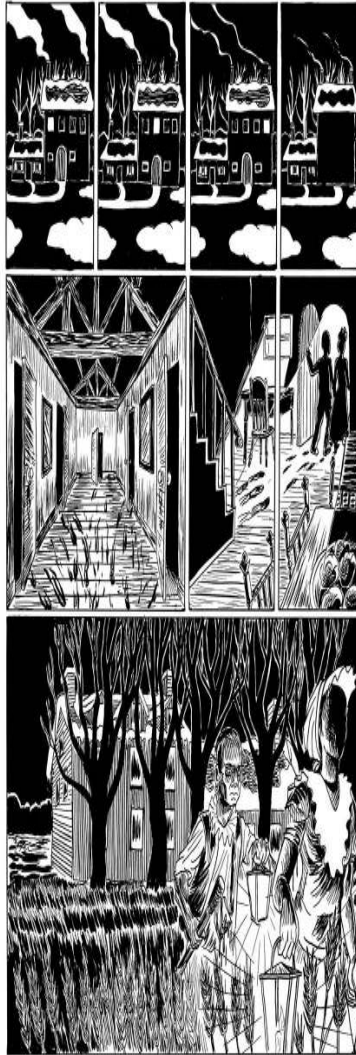


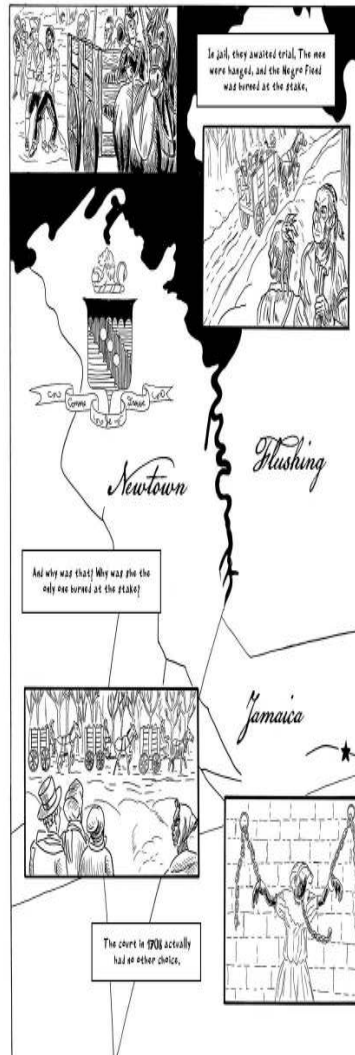


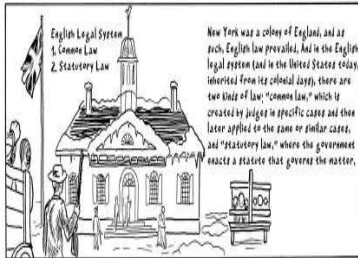
February 3-16,
January 26, 1707/18. On Saturday
night William Haller by his wife
and their five children were murdered
by an Indian man and a negro woman
their men slain and were apprehended
and confined in that jail.



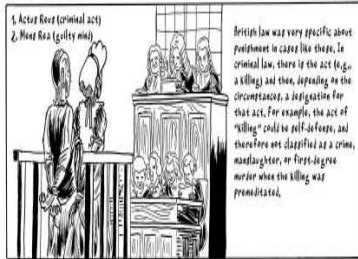




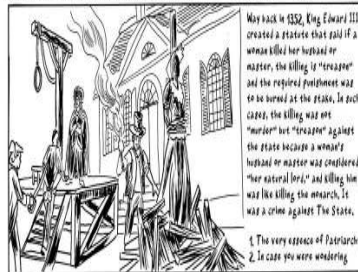




New York was a colony of England, and as such, English law prevailed. But in the English legal system (and in the United States today), inherited from its colonial days, there are two kinds of law: "common law," which is created by judges in specific cases and then later applied to the same or similar cases, and "statutory law," where the government enacts a statute that governs the matter.

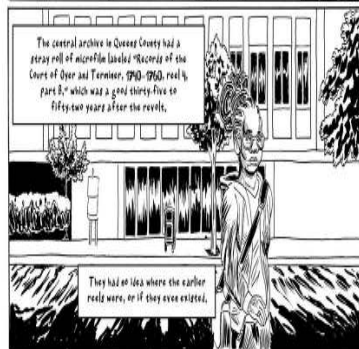
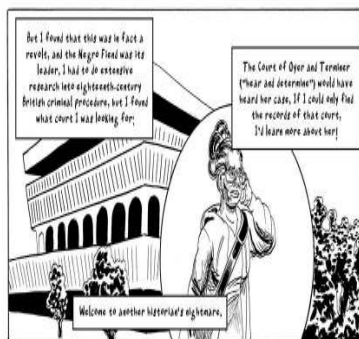


British law was very specific about punishment in cases like these. In criminal law, there is the act (e.g., a killing) and then, depending on the circumstances, a designation for that act. For example, the act of "killing" could be self-defense, and therefore not classified as a crime, manslaughter, or first-degree murder when the killing was premeditated.



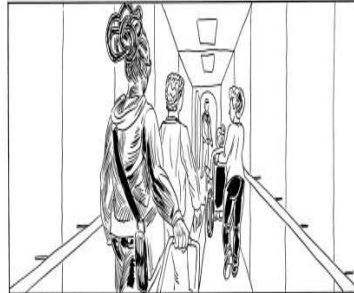
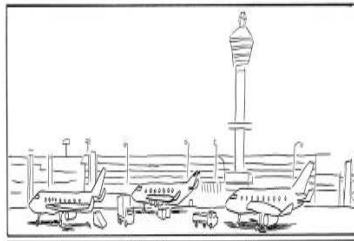
Way back in 1534, King Edward III created a statute that said if a woman killed her husband or master, the killing is "treason" and the required punishment was to be burned at the stake. In such cases, the killing was not "murder" but "treason" against the state because a woman's husband or master was considered "her natural lord," and killing him was like killing the monarch. It was a crime against The State.













Chapter 6
They Cut Off My Voice (So I Grew Two Voices)

SANTA CRUZ, 2001

When I wasn't researching,
I was teaching.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ





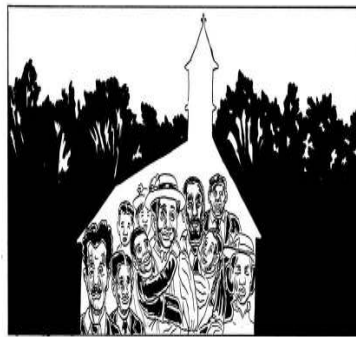


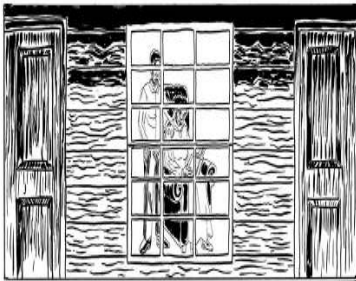




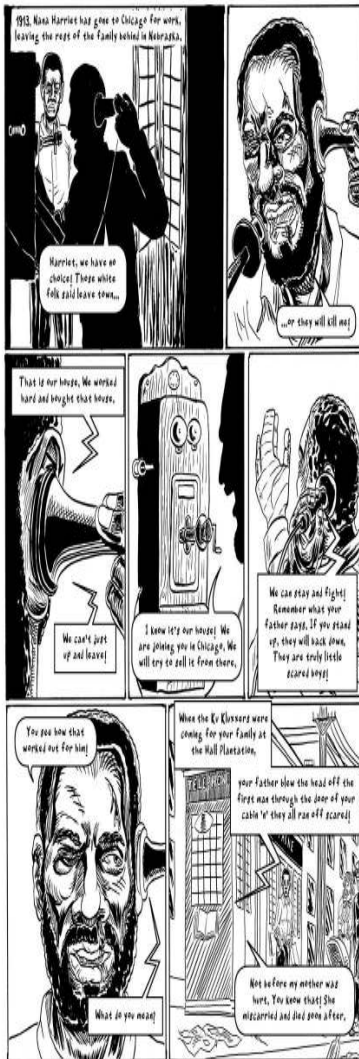
"Sweet Honey in the Rock," "Song of the Eilok," Live at Carnegie Hall, 1987.

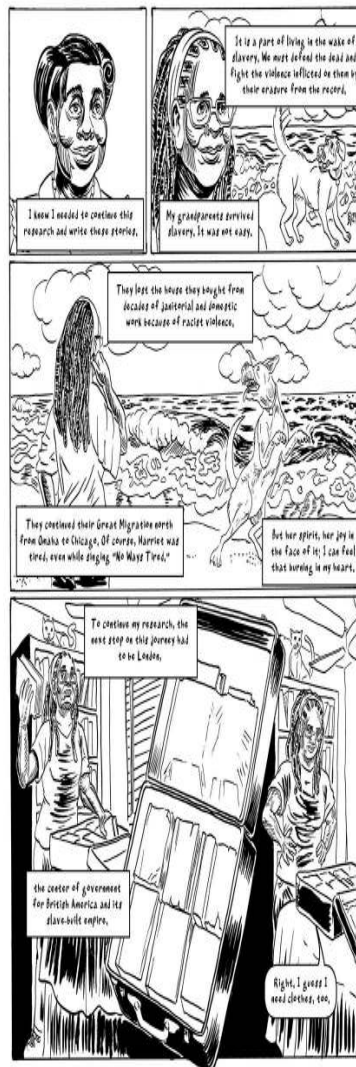




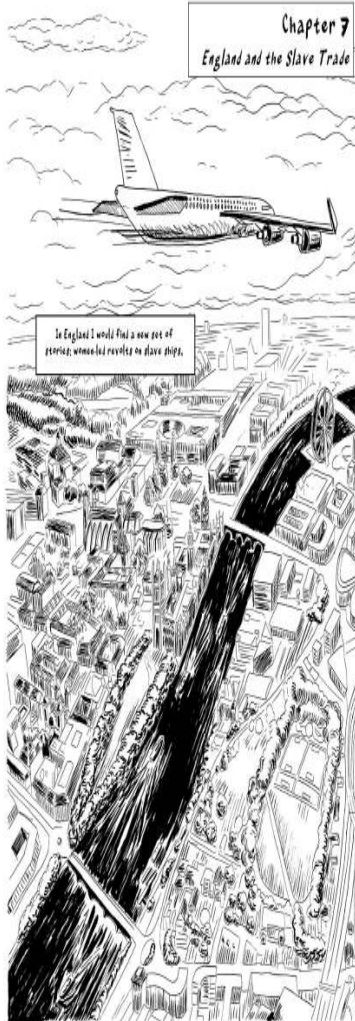






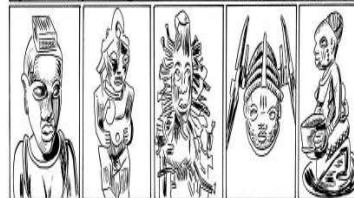
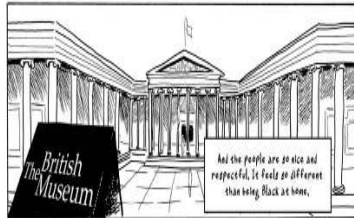


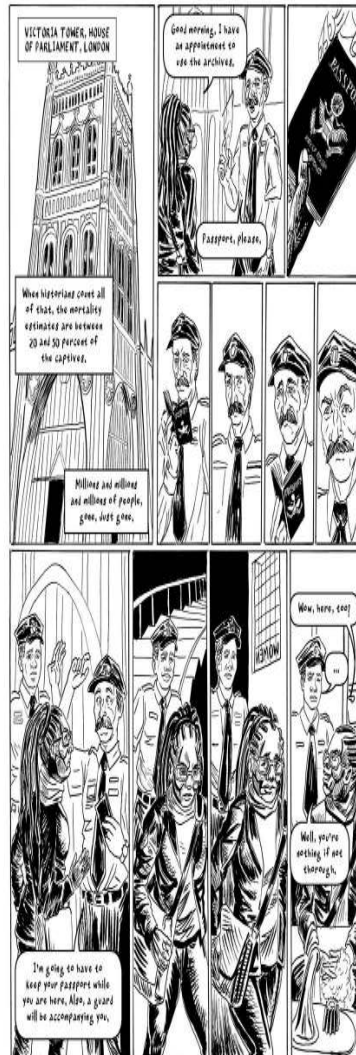
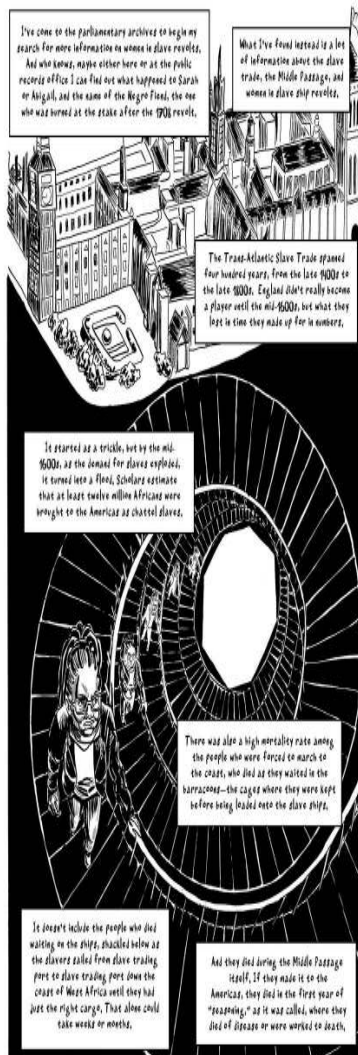
Chapter 7
England and the Slave Trade

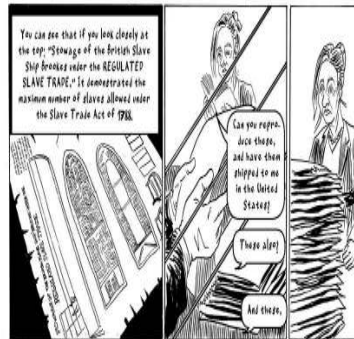


In England I would find a new set of
people, women led revolts on slave ships.









At first, Europeans could get to West Africa, but because of the wind and currents, they didn't have the means to return. Eventually they turned to the lateen sail, which allowed them to tack against the wind.

By the mid-1500s, the Portuguese were trying to land on the coast and raid for slaves, but they were driven back every time. West Africa in this age was made up of powerful nation-states with strong militaries.

In the early days of the trade, Europeans had to make trade agreements with individual kingdoms, and their trading fleets were limited, geographically, to the coast.

They made their way using wind, and anywhere horses could travel, they were already in use. Europeans had these poor-quality muskets, and if they could keep the powder dry, by the time they could get them loaded, they would have already been killed by the iron spears and arrows of the African militaries.

In addition, slaves were traded in Africa, as they were pretty much everywhere else in the world. But the prevailing places in Africa were not slaves in the way they came to be in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Chattel slavery, the system the captives would enter into, was race-based, for life, and a status inherited by your children. Slaves in Africa tended to be war captives or criminals, often treated similarly to people in Europe.

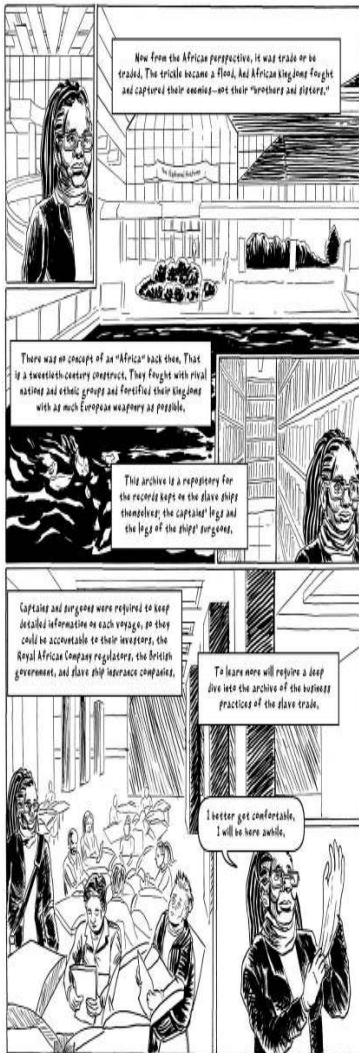
African kings and other elites would trade some of these slaves—the war captives, the criminals—or Europeans, usually in exchange for muskets and beads that brought them status. This trade was very small, a trickle compared to what would later develop.

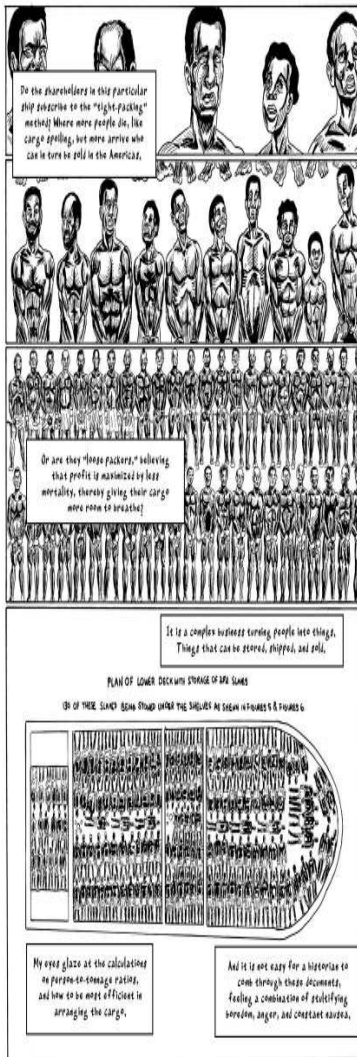
As time passed, two things changed: 1. As Europeans colonized the Americas, they needed huge amounts of labor. European demand for slaves skyrocketed, and 2. European military technology improved, and overtook that of West African kingdoms.

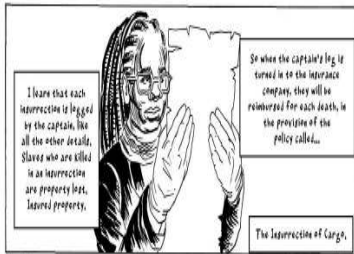
By the mid-1600s, these two factors combined caused devastation in West Africa. The European powers started trading items very strategically, to create as much "supply" of captives as possible. This evolved into what we call the "gun-slave cycle."

They would trade one gun for one captive. In order for these kingdoms to protect their people from being traded by rival kingdoms, they would have to capture and trade their enemies to get guns.





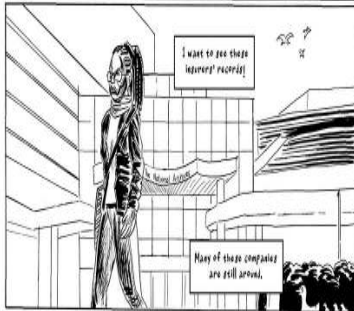




I learn that each insurance is logged by the captain, like all the other details. Slaves who are killed in an insurance are properly lost, insured property.

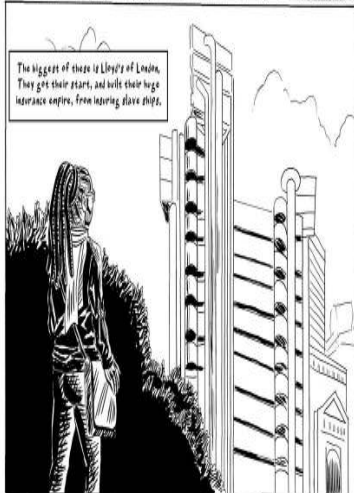
So when the captain's log is turned in to the insurance company, they will be reimbursed for each death, in the provision of the policy called...

The Insurance of Cargo.



I want to see these insurance records!

Many of these companies are still around.



The biggest of these is Lloyds of London. They got their start, and built their huge insurance empire, from insuring slave ships.



I'm a historian doing research and would like to find out how to get access to your company's archives.

Take the elevator up to the sixth floor. The archive information desk is there. Talk to them.

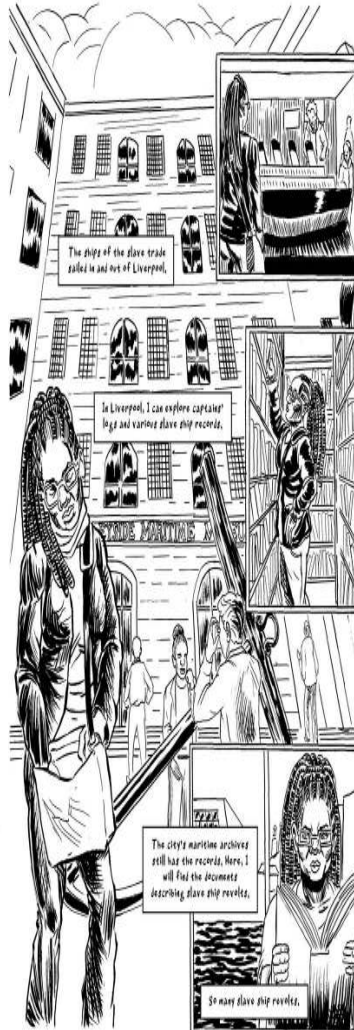
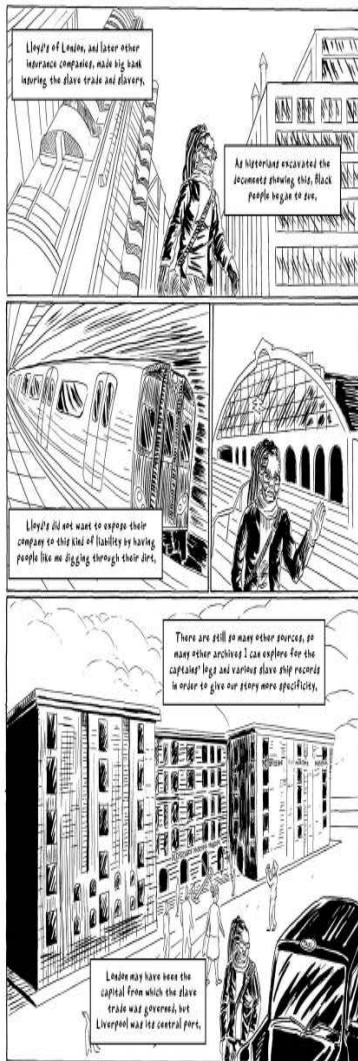
Thanks.

Hello, I'm here to do some research in your archive.

What documents would you like to access?

Your company's historical documents.

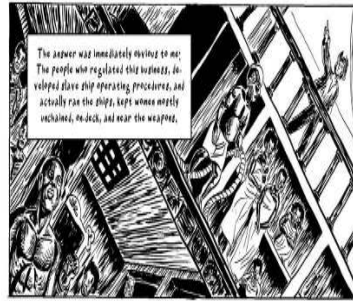
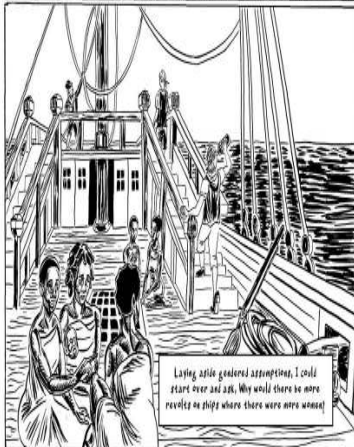
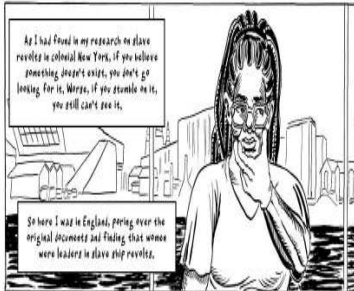
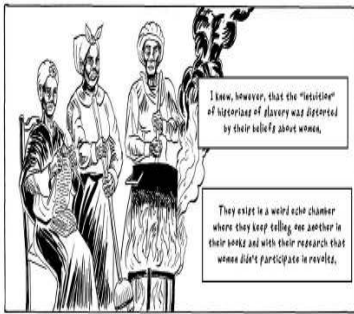


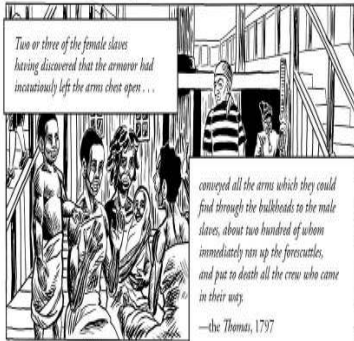
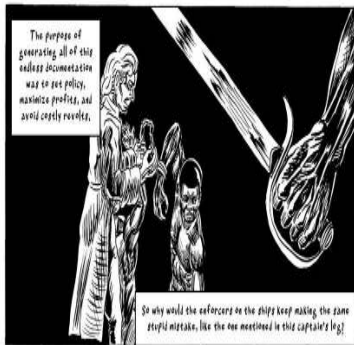






*Behrems et al., "The Costs of Coercion," *The Economic History Review* vol. 54, No 3 (August 2001): 460.







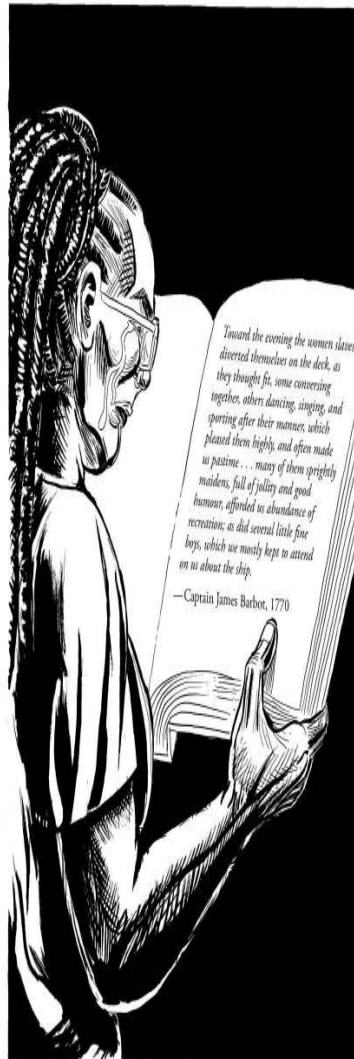
Upon boarding, both men and women were chained
involuntarily while the ships were near the African coast.



This was a dangerous time for slaves,
because boats on fire would often sink
the ships and free the slaves.

This was called a "cut off" and slavery
soon every precaution to avoid it happening.

Most cut offs were not successful.







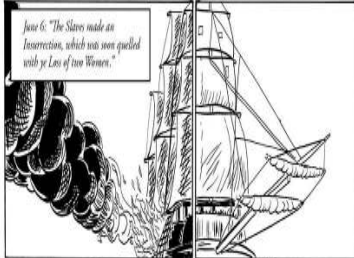


Arrive, Wiyaduh, May 19, 1770.

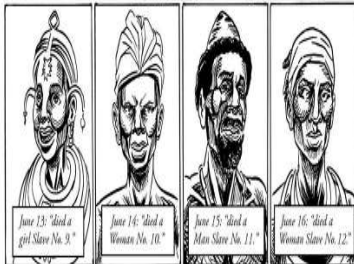


May 20: "got 200 slaves, 425 slaves on board."

May 31: "Depart Wiyaduh."



June 6: "The Slaves made an Insurrection, which was soon quelled with ye Loss of two Women."

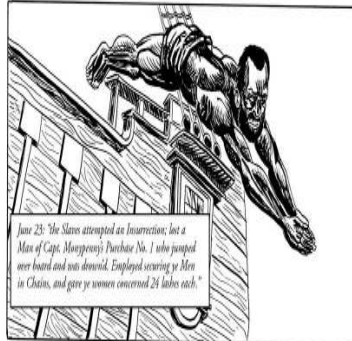


June 13: "died a girl Slave No. 9."

June 14: "died a Woman No. 10."

June 15: "died a Man Slave No. 11."

June 16: "died a Woman Slave No. 12."



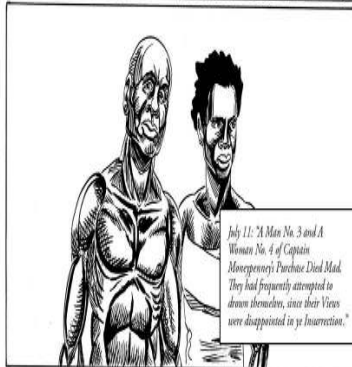
June 25: "the Slaves attempted an Insurrection; lost a Man of Capt. Montgenoy's Purchase No. 1 who jumped over board and was drowned. Employed securing ye Men in Chains, and gave ye women concerned 24 lashes each."



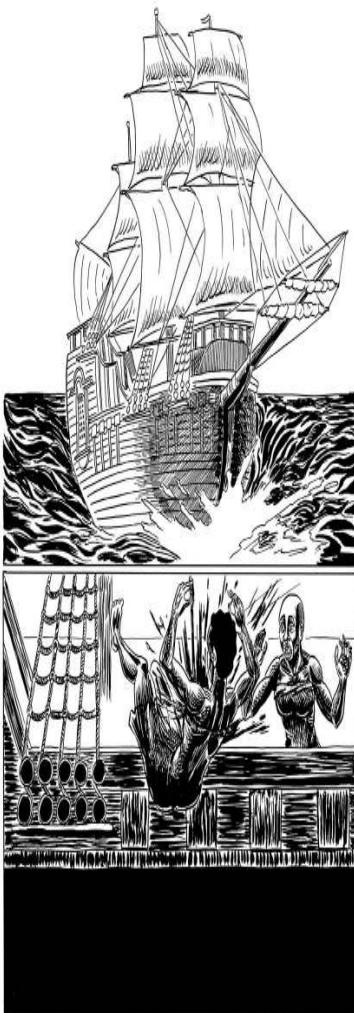
June 27: "the Slaves attempted to force up ye Coatings in the Night, with a design to murder ye whites or drown themselves but were prevented by ye watch in the morning."

"They confound their intentions and that ye women as well as ye men were determind if disappointed of cutting off ye whites."

"a jump overboard but in case of being prevented by their Irons were resolved at their last attempt to burn the ship. Their obstinacy put me under ye Necessity of shooting ye Ringleader."



July 11: "A Man No. 3 and A Woman No. 4 of Captain Montgenoy's Purchase Died Mad. They had frequently attempted to drown themselves, since their Vices were disappointed in ye Insurrection."



I am sick of reading about "Mansa No, 1" or "Mansa No, 2." Who were these women? What were their stories?

How did they get to this place and this time, where they were prepared to die fighting?

The Dutch traded captives from Mansa, one called Dula in present-day Senegal. We know a lot about this slave port and the millions brought into the trade through it.

About the social and political conditions in this part of West Africa at the time of Dula's voyage.

The wars caused by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade were fierce, and by the 1770s, they were desperate.

The Kingdom of Dahomey ruled here, but they were at war with the mighty Yoruba Oyo Empire in the east.

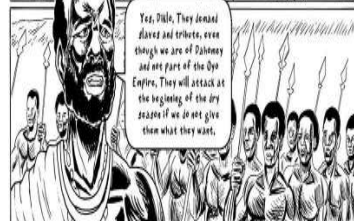
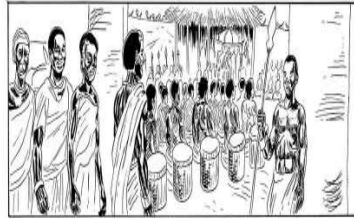
As a result of these wars, war captives abounded. It was these very captives who were sold into the Atlantic trade.

Documentation shows that there were women warriors involved in these wars, women from many different nations and ethnic groups fighting to protect their villages from slave traders throughout West Africa.

But the Kingdom of Dahomey, where Mansa was located, had a whole army of women soldiers. They were called the Agoes.



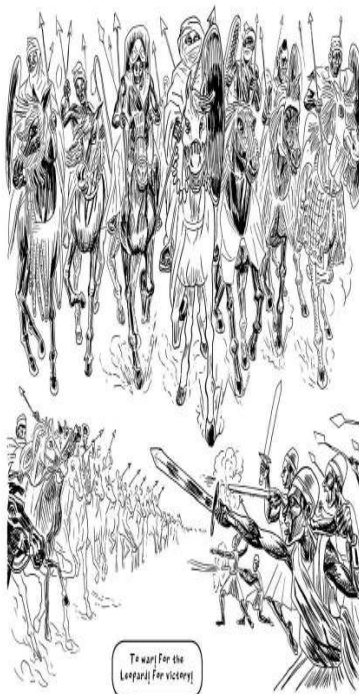


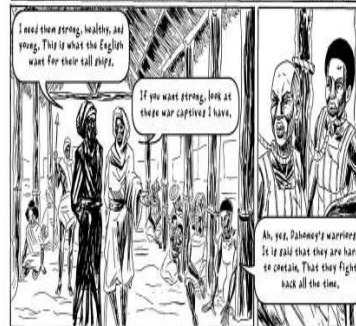
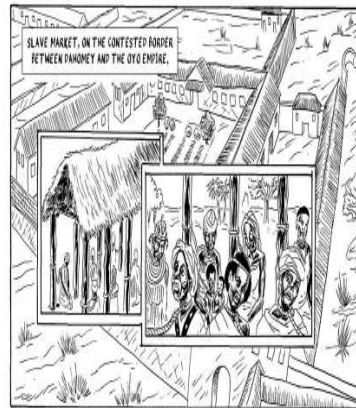


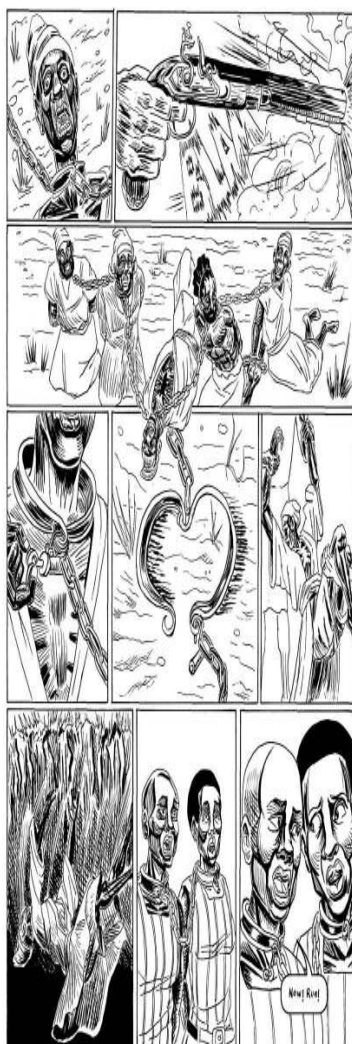


*The King of Dahomey







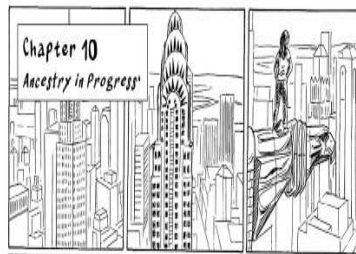




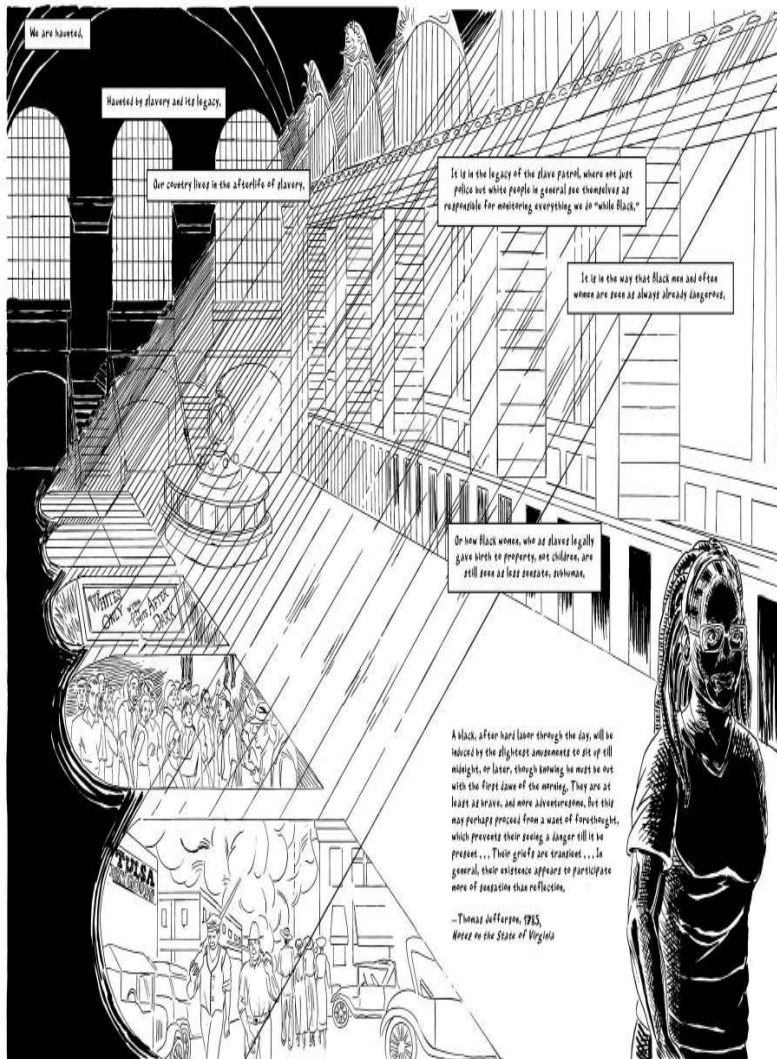








*Zap Mama, *Ancestry in Progress*, V2 Records, 2004.





It is said that haunting
makes the present waver,

Like a mirage floating above
and within the commonplace
structures of our lives,



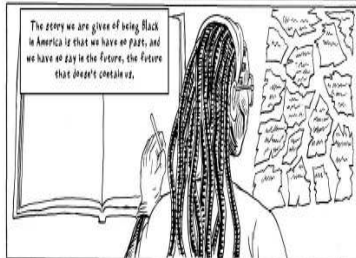
We need to see the present waver,
because the present we have been
given so insidiously is impossible,



We use our haunting to justify
what is affirmed as the truth
of our existence,



Because in this "truth,"
Black death is everywhere,



They say that the trauma of our
ancestors are stored inside us, in
our bodies, our minds, our spirits,

So too is our resilience,

As Audre Lorde said, "We
were never meant to survive,"

but we have,



The historical archive that violently erased
our past continued the violence against us,

This altar shapes what we
believe is even possible for us in
the future,



When we go back and retrieve our parts,

our way out of it way,

our legacy of resistance through impossible odds,

we redress the void of origin that would erase us,

We empower and bring joy to our present,

This is ancestry in progress, and it is our empowerment,





Acknowledgments

I wrote this book for my grandmother Harriet Thorpe Hall (1860–1927), for all the women who fought slavery, and for all of us living in its afterlife.

This book would not have happened without the support of Bea Hammond, my partner of thirty-two years. After the fourth time I was racist-fired from a professorship or teaching position, we agreed that I should step out of institutions of white supremacy, and Bea supported the family, giving me the time to figure out what was next for me. That turned out to be turning my dissertation and published articles into this graphic novel. Our son, Caleb, has helped me stay focused on what is truly important, even in the face of adversity. I also joyfully thank all of *Wake's* supporters on Kickstarter, who gave me the resources to get a start on this book, and even more importantly, created buzz and visibility. And thanks Easton Smith for contacting the press about the Kickstarter campaign entirely on his own initiative. Special thanks here to Sara Ramirez for using their Twitter account to recommend my Kickstarter project to their gazillion followers.

Anjali Singh is my agent and my angel. Everyone thanks their agents in their acknowledgments, but Anjali picked up a somewhat abstract idea and taught me everything from how to write a book proposal to how to deal with a publishing auction. I literally knew nothing about this process and would never have thought in a million years that my passion project would be of interest to more than a handful of people. Anjali helped me see that this book was so much more than that and kept reminding me until I began to believe it. Thanks to Tananarive Due and John Jennings for connecting me to Anjali. I had the honor of Anjali calling me to say she wanted to represent me, and ever since she has fought for me and this project like a mother lion. And she even responds to my texts on weekends.

I want to thank my friend Kate Savage, who helped me think about this project in its pre-infancy, and for suggesting I be a character in this book. Kate also connected me to Hugo Martinez, who has been a diligent, thorough, and brilliant artist to work with. Hugo, your art has brought this work to life. And thanks to both Vita Ayala and Jason Little, who helped me understand how to write a graphic novel script. Deep thanks go to Sarula Bao and Caroline Brewer, who joined Team *Wake* right after it was picked up by S&S and managed pre-production. They held my hand and gave me confidence as I fumbled in the dark,

trying to shift from an academic writer to a visual writer. And special thanks to Sarah Beth Huffbauer, who has been my dearest friend for over forty years, and has had my back through some very dark times. Thank you for helping me edit the final draft of this book in the midst of a pandemic over several five-hour phone calls when I had lost all sense of motivation and direction.

I also must thank Dawn Davis, the publisher and original editor of *Wake*. She believed in this project from jump and her edits made this a better book. And after Dawn left S&S, Carina Guiterman smoothly stepped in as editor, shepherding me and this book through the dizzying publishing process with the help of Chelcee Johns and Lashanda Anakwah. Thanks also to Kayley Hoffman for proofreading, Jon Evans for copyediting, and Morgan Hart, the production editor. Brianna Scharfenberg of publicity and Leila Siddiqui of marketing joined Team *Wake* with amazing enthusiasm for the work and patience with me as I kept forgetting which of them was in charge of what.

Donna Haraway, my feminist theory professor and dissertation advisor, has supported my academic work on women in slave revolts in so many ways, continuously, even fifteen years after receiving my PhD. A rare and generous advocate, her belief in the importance of this work helped me stay on course.

Finally I want to acknowledge my parents. My mother, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, for showing me that being a historian can have a profound impact on the world. My father, Harry Haywood (1898–1985), for telling me stories of my grandmother, giving me great books to read at an early age, and showing me through lived example how to be brave and proud in the face of constant white supremacist violence—and to never give up the fight.

—Rebecca Hall

For this incredible opportunity, I thank Dr. Rebecca Hall. Also Kate Savage, our Kickstarter supporters, Leah Champagne, Jesse Moss, Dan Brawner, Gene Menerat, Brett Thompson, Luke Howard, Mike Vulpes, Bob Sneed, Michael Lapinski, Sally Richardson, Kalli Padgett, Erika Wirt, Jonah Quinn, and Fernando Lopez.

—Hugo Martinez

Selected Primary Sources

1712 Revolt

Boston News-Letter, April 7–12, 1712.

Coroner's Inquest of William Ashit, April 9, 1712. Coroner's Inquest of Augustus Grantett, April 9, 1712.

Misc. MSS, NYC, Box 4, Manuscripts Collection, New-York Historical Society.

Coroner's Inquest of Adriaen Hoogland, April 9, 1712. New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives.

Governor Robert Hunter. Letters to the Lords of Trade. Public Records Office, London, CO5 1091.

Minutes of the Privy Council, 1712. Public Records Office, London, PC2/884.

Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675–1776. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905.

Minutes of the Supreme Court of Judicature, 1712. Pp. 399–427. New York City Municipal Archives.

Minutes of the Quarter Sessions, 1694–1731. Pp. 214–241. New York City Municipal Archives.

O'Callaghan, E. B. *The Documentary History of the State of New-York*. Albany: Weed, Parsons, 1850.

———. *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York*. Albany: Weed, Parsons, 1855.

———. *Calendar of New York Colonial Commissioners, 1680–1770*. New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1929.

Philipse, Adolphus. Will of Adolphus Philipse. Manuscripts Division Collection, New-York Historical Society.

The Laws of His Majesty's Colony of New York. London: William Bradford, 1718.

Van Dam, Rip. Inventory of the Estate of Rip Van Dam, 1749. Misc. MSS, NYC, Manuscripts Collection.

New-York Historical Society.

1708 Revolt

Boston News-Letter, February 10, 1708; February 1623, 1708.

Lord Cornbury. Letter to the Board of Trade, February 10, 1708. In *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the City of New York*. E. B. O'Callaghan, p. 39. Albany: Weed, Parsons, 1855.

Riker, James. Papers. New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives.

Town Minutes of New-York. New York: Historical Records Survey, 1940.

Slave Ship Sources

Atlantic Slave Trade Database, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>.

Burdett, James. *Some Account of the Trade in Slaves from Africa as Connected with Europe and America*.

London: Longman, Brown, 1842.

Burton, Richard. *A Mission to Gambia, King of Dahomey*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1966.

Brooker, Richard. *Liverpool as it was During the Last Quarter of the Eighteenth Century*. P. 236. Liverpool:

Liverpool Publishing House, 1853.

Donnan, Elizabeth. *Document Illustrations of the History of the Slave Trade to America*. 4 vols. New York:

Octagon Books, 1965.

Hain, Paul, ed. *Barbott on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbott on West Africa, 1678–1712*. 2 vols. London:

The Hakluyt Society, 1992.

Hastings, Hugh. *Eccelesiastical Records, State of New York, Vol. III*. Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, 1902.

House of Lords Records Office. Misc. slave ship captains' logs and surgeons' logs. London.

Sudgrave, Captain William. *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave-Trade, Slavery Series, No.*

11. London: James, John, and Paul Knapton, 1734.

The Unity, log of, 1709–1771, Earle Family Papers, Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, DF

EARLE/1/4 (no pagination).

For a complete bibliography of sources see ghahallphiblog.org

A Conversation with the Author

Why a graphic narrative?

Graphic narrative is a powerful medium that allowed me to accomplish what I couldn't in any other format. The use of text and images in a complex back-and-forth relationship allowed me to put the past right up against the present, which was crucial for this book. It also allowed me to make this story more accessible while keeping its complexity. The sources on enslaved women are only fragments in the archive. The structure of the medium—panels with gutters (the blank space between panels)—is uniquely suited to recover and honor these stories and restore them to the historical record.



The graphic narrative format is a powerful methodology for portraying what I call the “shape of absence.” Hugo and I do this here, while also breaking the pacing of the panel/gutter arrangement to then push at the form’s boundaries to create more emotional impact. Here, the four women prosecuted for their involvement in the New York City Slave Revolt of 1712, drawn in blank outline, push up through the gutter and pierce through the panel above where I sit, researching them.



Why should we learn about slavery and slave resistance? Can't we just move on to Black joy?

I am all for Black joy! But in order to have it, we need to honor the powerful resilience and resistance of our ancestors. Otherwise, Black people become burdened with shame about our history and thus ourselves. Our joy becomes shallow, rootless. A certain hip-hop artist recently said that since slavery lasted so long, it must have been a choice. During the George Floyd uprisings, I saw a photo of a young woman wearing a T-shirt that said: "We are NOT our ancestors. We will P ck you up!" It made me sad, because the history of slave resistance is taught so poorly, if it is taught at all. We need to know this history so we can take pride in it, so we can draw on the strength and power of our ancestors to fight for the change we need.

Unfortunately we can't "just move on." If we are going to understand our present and how to change it, we need to understand the past. The United States is plagued by the legacy of slavery. The history we are taught in high school is usually one long process of erasing resistance, and erasing how social change actually happens. Grounding our joy firmly in the power of our ancestors is ancestry in progress, and it is the path to Black joy.



Why does *Wake* focus on the eighteenth century?

In *Wake*, I talk about how I left the practice of law to go back and study this history. I knew that the history of slavery was deforming the justice system and the world around us, but I didn't understand how.

I study racialized gender. I focus specifically on how concepts of race and gender were used to create the law of chattel slavery and how this still shapes our lives today. Slavery unfortunately existed in many times and in many places, but the race-based chattel slavery in the Americas was a uniquely horrible new thing introduced in the early colonial period, and it continues to structure systems of race and gender today. This form of chattel slavery, in which Black people were transformed into property and their children inherited this status, was created by law in the Americas in this early period. It takes a lot to legally turn people into property. In order to make this happen, the new laws that established chattel slavery created two genders of women: white women who gave birth to heirs of property, and Black women who gave birth to property. People who give birth to property and people who are born property are thereby constructed as subhuman.

This is what drew me to that early time period. And as I quickly found in graduate school, it is a bad mental health formula to study slavery and not study slave resistance. This is how I came to the study of slave revolt.

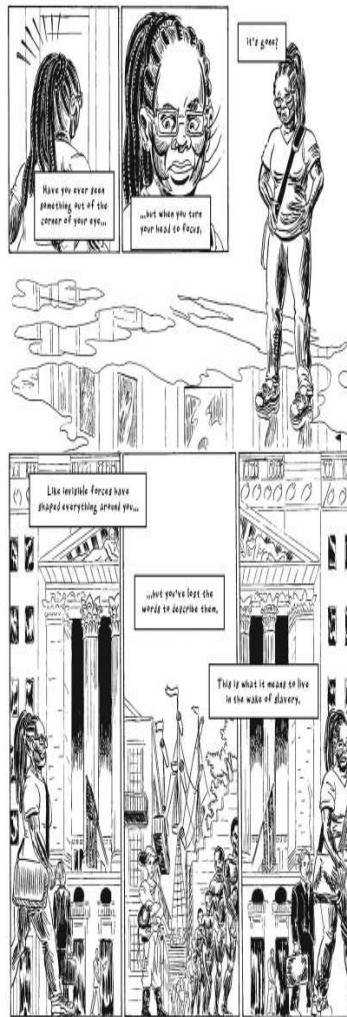


Why New York City?

I'm from New York City and have always been drawn to its history. Yet I didn't learn until graduate school about just how central both the institution of slavery and the slave trade were in the creation and building of New York City as the world's financial capital.

If people are taught the history of slavery, they are taught that it was a southern, rural institution. But slavery existed everywhere in the British colonies and continued to exist in parts of the northern United States well into the nineteenth century. Enslaved labor was used to build and run urban areas as well as rural areas. Enslaved people built the infrastructure of New York City: the roads, the docks, even the wall that protected the city from Indigenous people trying to get their land back. That wall ran the length of what is now called Wall Street.

In 1700, half of the white population of New York City owned slaves. Enslaved people made up over 20 percent of the population. The only other city that had a higher population of enslaved people in 1700 was Charleston, South Carolina.



Why is the history of women in slave revolts “hidden”?

To understand why the role of women in slave revolts has been erased from history, it is necessary to understand something called “historiography” and how it differs from history. History is the event in the past being studied. Historiography is the study of how history is written and what factors shape the historical interpretation of the past. All historical writing is someone’s perspective. Historiography traces those perspectives and what shaped them. It is the study of how those perspectives shift over time and why. This is actually really important! Historians always write in a social and political context, and this shapes how they write about the past. They also write in conversation with other historians’ interpretations of the past. In *Wake*, I show how historians claimed that women didn’t participate in slave revolts despite the fact that their participation was documented in the records created at the time of those events. But why did historians leave women out of the story?

The perspective of the historians who first wrote about the history of slave resistance was that there was none. Mainstream history taught that slavery was a benign institution, a civilizing force, and no one wanted to resist it. When these blatant racists were no longer part of the mainstream, other historians started focusing on recovering the story of slave revolts from the archives. When this shift happened in the late 1960s and 1970s, US culture was saturated with the idea that Black people lived in their own subculture, created during slavery,

that was responsible for the poverty and disenfranchisement they faced. It was caused not by systemic racism and economic exploitation, but by this so-called defective culture, caused by having the “wrong” gender roles. Black women were matriarchs who emasculated Black men, and therefore Black people as a whole would never succeed unless they changed their gender roles. The historians who were interpreting the history of revolt insisted that this was not true. That Black people always had the “correct” gender roles. That Black women “did not undermine their men” by participating in organized violent uprisings like revolts.

No historian pushed back at this sexist interpretation, even during the later rise of feminist historiography. The study of women’s history became more mainstream in the 1980s and onward, and these historians focused on recovering and honoring what they saw as more “feminine” types of resistance. This included “individual” acts of violence, like poisonings or arson, or acts that were less violent and less confrontational, like breaking tools or feigning illness. These historians wanted to honor this type of resistance, and I agree. It should be reclaimed and honored.

When I was working on my dissertation at the turn of the century, my research and interpretation rejected the original idea that women weren’t involved in revolts. I received a lot of pushback. The idea is still seen by many as controversial, despite the existence of historical records proving otherwise. That is the power of historiography!

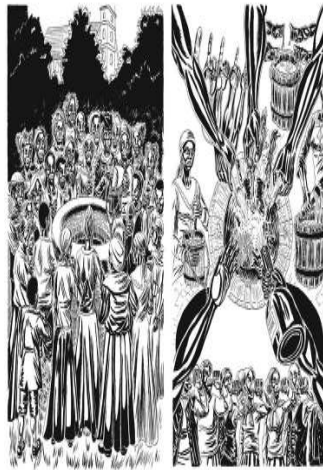
What does “the measured use of historical imagination” mean? How is it different from fiction?

All history is written by historians who use sources to then create a vision of what happened in the past. But sometimes the records fall completely silent, as they often did in my research for *Wake*. But instead of just giving up and leaving the lives of these women in complete silence, I use the same historical training to take this process one step further and try to reconstruct what *could* have happened. I call this “the measured use of historical imagination.” And in the one and a half of the ten chapters in *Wake* where I do this, I clearly let the reader know when I am doing so, to keep integrity in the process.



For example, in imagining and creating visuals for the stories of the women involved in the New York City Slave Revolt of 1712, there is not one cobblestone, not one plant, not one city layout, that wasn't carefully researched.

The oath-taking ceremony in chapter 3, only briefly referred to in the colonial governor's correspondence, is drawn from sources in another British colony where the enslaved people were also predominantly Akan. These documents, which described in detail how these ceremonies work, were created to prevent slave revolts. It cautioned enslavers about what to be on watch for. If they saw an enslaved person gathering graveyard dirt, it was probably for an oath-taking ceremony and a revolt was being planned. This allowed Hugo and me to use those detailed descriptions to visualize the oath-taking ceremony that occurred before the revolt.



Since there are obviously no photos of the city in the early 1700s, I used the first two decades of eighteenth-century city council meetings to get a sense of what New York City looked like. The council minutes reveal incredibly useful details in their recording of mundane disputes about things like how to light the streets and who had to pay for the candles, or passing an ordinance that a specific neighborhood had to do a better job weeding around their houses.

for fire prevention. This allowed us to visualize the city. I also used forensic anthropologists' analysis of the skeletons in the African Burial Ground, which showed that men and women were forced to do equally hard labor. There were even skeletons of women who had died from skull collapse from carrying heavy loads. Burial arrangements with specific grave goods showed that one woman was likely an Obeah priestess. We even know how many of those buried were originally born in Africa by analyzing nutrition patterns. Those born in Africa started with good nutrition that then deteriorated after being taken to New York City, whereas enslaved people born in New York City had poor nutrition from the start.

The measured use of historical imagination, as opposed to fiction, describes only what absolutely could have happened. For that reason, I felt comfortable using it in *Wake*.

EXPERIENCE THE EXTENDED STORY.

PERFORMED BY A FULL CAST, AVAILABLE ONLY IN AUDIO.

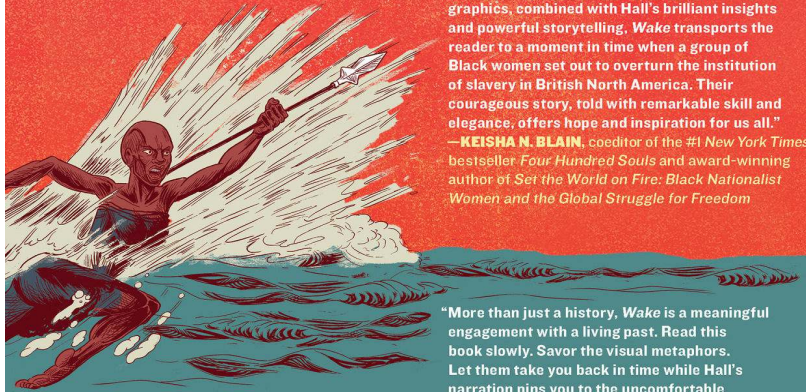
WAKE

THE AUDIO DRAMA



"Not only a riveting tale of Black women's leadership of slave revolts but an equally dramatic story of the engaged scholarship that enabled its discovery."
—**ANGELA Y. DAVIS**, political activist and professor emerita, departments of History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

"*Wake* is a revelation. . . . Hall's writing cleverly flows between the reality of her research on Black women-led slave revolts and speculative imaginings that uncover the spectrum of human experience and resilience."
—**JOHN JENNINGS**, Eisner Award-winning illustrator of Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* graphic novel



"*Wake* makes accessible the historians' craft in the service of telling the powerful stories of women-led slave revolts. With the moving illustrations of Martinez and the impressive storytelling of Hall, we are transported into 1712, 1708, and the four-hundred-year history of the Black Atlantic, gaining a deeper sense of women-led uprisings. Infusing the text with her personal story and a sharp historical imagination, Hall never wavers in giving life to this history. She lifts the veil on enslaved women's leadership in the relentless pursuit of freedom. She brings into the present stories that must be read and passed on."
—**ROSE M. BREWER**, professor of Afro-American and African studies, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

"Hall and Martinez connect the past and the present in a moving and exciting narrative that brings to light the history of slavery in the United States. Showing how enslaved women resisted slavery, even though their participation in rebellions remains largely absent from written records, *Wake* will be a crucial tool to introduce students to the problematic nature of slavery primary sources."
—**ANA LUCIA ARAUJO**, professor of history, Howard University

"In this beautiful and moving graphic novel, Hall unearths a history so often overlooked: the significant role Black women played in leading slave revolts. Through Martinez's vivid graphics, combined with Hall's brilliant insights and powerful storytelling, *Wake* transports the reader to a moment in time when a group of Black women set out to overturn the institution of slavery in British North America. Their courageous story, told with remarkable skill and elegance, offers hope and inspiration for us all."
—**KEISHA N. BLAIN**, coeditor of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Four Hundred Souls* and award-winning author of *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom*

"More than just a history, *Wake* is a meaningful engagement with a living past. Read this book slowly. Savor the visual metaphors. Let them take you back in time while Hall's narration pins you to the uncomfortable present. This book will haunt you the way that the legacies of slavery haunt this country."
—**TREVOR R. GETZ**, professor of African and world history, San Francisco State University, and author of *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History*

"We who live in the wake of centuries of white supremacy feel the hidden history of our ancestors' struggle to survive uncovered in this book. In its pages we not only feel their sorrow in bondage but also their elation when they finally broke free."
—**BEN PASSMORE**, author of *Your Black Friend and Other Strangers*