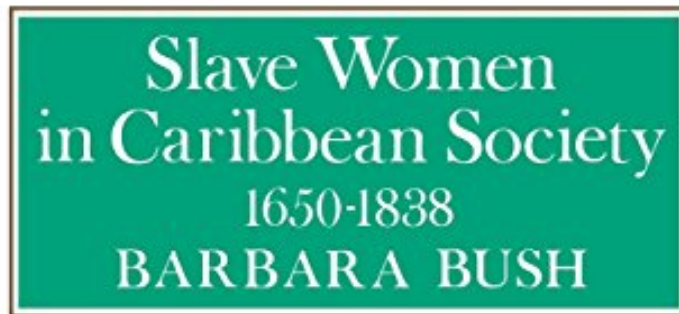


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## Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1832: Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838

*Barbara Bush*

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**Barbara Bush : Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1832: Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1832: Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Old but excellent. By Virginia M. Gould This book is priceless. I use it in my research and teaching. It is well written and well researched. Anyone needing a good history of slave women in the Caribbean should read this book. 19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Paints a vivid portrait of Caribbean women slave life. By Chris G This book is about the role of black women in resistance to slavery in the British Caribbean. The author writes that life in the British Caribbean was particularly savage; planters were so busy driving their slaves to make a profit that they didn't have time to formulate any paternalist ideology as happened with slave-owners in the American South. Some of the examples of the evidence presented here is given below. She notes a large outcry by planters in Trinidad in 1823 when the whipping of female slaves was banned. The planters argued that it was the only effective device for specifically keeping female slaves in line. "One colonial office official stated that female slaves 'more frequently merited punishment than males.'" She quotes accounts from several planters about the particular insolence of domestic female slaves. Such domestics were often in a worse position than fieldhands for they were under much closer scrutiny of masters and vulnerable to the latter's sexual lecheries and subsequent raging jealousies of the master's wife. Even with benevolent masters as lovers, the slave women would manipulate and steal from them. Such manipulation and stealing by all slaves was seen as evidence of being inherent traits among Africans by people too stupid to comprehend that the slaves might be asserting their own individuality and freedom by this act. She quotes an account from testimony before the House of Commons in 1790 by one Henry Coor who reported that the owner of a Jamaican plantation where he stayed one night nailed the ear of a domestic slave to a tree post because she had broken a plate. The slave in the morning was found to have wrenched her ear out of this imprisonment and when found was severely whipped. She quotes an account from a Dr. John Williamson who related the story of a slave giving birth after having been confined in the stocks and then dying of a fever. She quotes accounts from estates owned by two London merchants, Thomas and William King. In one estate she quotes a punishment book that of the 34 slaves punished in the first six months of 1827, 21 were women. She quotes a number of accounts of individual insubordination on an estate of the Kings in what is now Guiana in South America. Even though a slave named Clarrissa had her punishment increased from 12 hours of solitary confinement to 60 hours chained in the stockade, her insubordination did not decrease, writes the author. She quotes accounts from a liberal planter named Monk Lewis who reported a scene of insubordination at his place where female slaves affected a work slowdown. When an overseer demanded that the women do their duty, one of the latter ran at the former and tried to strangle him. Lewis is quoted on reports of white overseers kicking pregnant black women in their bellies and thereby damaging the child or the mother. Slave-owners began to enact legislation for their own benefit to ameliorate the harsh treatment of black women, for with slave importation being banned, they were concerned about slave labor not destroying the fertility of women. They also were under pressure from abolitionists. Black women generally received solitary confinement or being chained up in the stocks as opposed to the whippings still delivered on black men. Though the whip on women was still being used. The author quotes an account from a plantation in Grenada in 1823 of a female slave being whipped and again apparently another female being whipped ten years later for destroying sugar canes and "general neglect of duty." She quotes an account from this time of female slave at the plantation of Mrs. Carrie Carmicheal who colored her tongue a different color each check-up to make it seem like she was ill but then her tongue was whiped cleaned to reveal that she had been faking illness to avoid work and she was thus flogged. She gives accounts of slave women being involved in many rebellions. There is the Jamaican maroon leader Nanny in the 1730's and "Cubah," leader of the slave revolt in Jamaica in 1760. She quotes an account from a rebellion in Surinam in 1730 where 8 of the 11 executed for it were women. Six of the females were "broken alive on the rack" and the other two, youngsters, were decapitated but they had such nerve in facing these atrocities that they "did not utter a sigh." She quotes an account from a male slave under interrogation that the only major uprising on Barbados, which took place in 1816, was formented by a woman. She states that from contemporary accounts, women played a big role in the mob actions to protest poor working conditions in St. Kitts in 1834 during the brief "apprenticeship." She "transition" to emancipation. There were two women in the group of sixteen sentenced for sedition and mutiny in this incident. She quotes an account from an English official during the great uprising of 20,000 slaves in Jamaica in 1831 that women were heavily involved as guides for rebels, as provocateurs to try to cause harm to British forces, and so on. She gives accounts of how black women were feared because of their knowledge of Obeah herbal formulas that could poison whites and their leadership in African religious ceremonies which could be occasions for plotting rebellion. She talks alot about the sexual mores of slave women. The planters propagated the notion that black women were inherently inclined towards promiscuity. Contemporary abolitionists agreed that slave women were promiscuous, only arguing that the degradation of slavery made them that way. She goes through an analysis of West African and slave sexual and marriage customs. Many African societies seem to have had a custom of "trial marriage" and divorce was relatively easy to obtain. In maroon communities, according to the author, young women were accorded something like "coming out" parties perhaps similar to those for aristocratic girls in Europe. The author quotes a Barbados parliament report to the House of Commons in 1789 that the black women there were very gentle and virtuous. She quotes a Jamaican slave doctor who estimated that black men were no more promiscuous than men in England..... The author concludes that most slave families were monogamous, with strong retention of African extended family structures

despite the threat of enforced separation through sales. Polygamy was rather minor and according to accounts, the first wives in such relationships obtained almost equal status with the husbands. She quotes slave-owners accounts of the generous and happy relations among slaves. She explores the evidence that the low fertility rate among slaves in the West Indies was due to black women killing their babies within nine days after birth or willing their own miscarriage. The book gets exceedingly slow to read towards the end.....

... pioneering study in an area long neglected by historians." *Womens Review of Books*... we must admire this as an important and interesting contribution." *The Times of the Americas* Bush's well-organized and clearly written book will appeal to readers interested in womens studies and comparative studies of the black diaspora.... readable and valuable... " *Choice*... Bush's outstanding contribution is documenting womens unique resistance: They did everything they could not to bear children." *New Directions For Women*... extremely informative and enjoyable to read, performing the valuable contribution of collecting and analysing data about a relatively neglected topic... " *Gender and History* Both the general reader and the academic specialist should find this book a valuable contribution to the discourse on gender and slave relations in plantation America" *International Migration Review* This is the first book on black slave women to take into account the complexities of gender, race, and class which made their experience of slavery different from that of the black men. Bush challenges certain myths surrounding black womens lives as workers, mothers, and as activists in the vanguard of resistance to slavery.

**About the Author** Barbara Bush was born in Rye, New York, and married George H.W. Bush in 1945. She was the First Lady of the United States from 1989 to 1993. She has five children, including President George W. Bush and Florida Governor Jeb Bush, and fourteen grandchildren. She is the founder of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. She lives in Houston, Texas, and Kennebunkport, Maine.