

HOMEWORK HELPSHEET / REVISION FILE

RESISTANCE AND REVOLT KP5

BACKGROUND

Africans resisted their loss of freedom by individual acts of resistance and by organised revolts. Most of these revolts were unsuccessful and were severely punished. Resistance began in Africa. Villages that were attacked usually fought to avoid capture and enslavement but they stood little chance with knives and spears against slave raiders armed with rifles and pistols. On the journey to the coast slaves captives were chained together with leg irons and roped together in a coffle. Any attempt to escape or resist resulted in a flogging or even death. When they reached the coast captive slaves were kept in chains and imprisoned in a slave factory or a baracoon where they were closely watched day and night. Once on board ship captains and crews were always worried about revolts. They searched the holds daily for possible weapons and severely punished any acts of resistance. In the West Indies Africans faced brutal treatment and a total lack of freedom. This was because owners lived in constant fear of rebellion. Owners and overseers abused their slaves and inflicted cruel punishments for even small mistakes in the belief that this would put an end to any thought of resistance and slaves would be too scared to disobey.

☒ Once on board ship some slaves committed suicide by jumping overboard and drowning, or by starving themselves. To prevent this nets were placed at the side of the ships to catch slaves. Those who refused to eat were force fed using an iron jaw-opener or tortured until they ate.

☒ There were many attempts by slaves to take over ships during the middle passage. They attacked and killed members of the crew. Most of these revolts were unsuccessful and resulted in severe floggings and execution of the ringleaders. Even if they were successful, slaves did not have the skills to navigate and steer the ship.

☒ When they arrived in the West Indies slaves were weak and in no state to resist after the middle passage. Slaves from the same tribe were usually split up to stop them joining together in rebellions.

☒ There were slave rebellions against plantation owners but they were usually put down quickly. Slave owners had guns and were backed up by the army if this was necessary to put down rebellions. Rebellion usually meant a long painful death for slaves who took part.

☒ Plantation slaves in the West Indies attempted to escape but very few were successful. Some set up communities in the swamps and mountains out of the reach of slave-owners.

☒ Runaway slaves found it difficult to survive and were easily identified by their skin colour and the brand mark of their owner. Rewards were offered for the return of runaway slaves and there were professional hunters who made their living re-capturing escaped slaves.

☒ If caught runaways were punished by flogging or being forced to wear heavy iron collars around heir necks. Repeated attempts to escape could lead to a hand or foot being cut off or even death.

☒ Many slaves pretended to be stupid, worked slowly and broke tools and machines or committed acts of individual revenge.

☒ Slaves were in a strange land far from home with no hope of getting back and no place to run to. Punishments for slaves were painful and cruel -it took a lot of courage to resist.