

Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020)

Clifton E. Sorrell III

Volume 89, Spring 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090062ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52975/lt.2022v89.0041>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Sorrell III, C. (2022). Review of [Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020)]. *Labour / Le Travail*, 89, 350–352. <https://doi.org/10.52975/lt.2022v89.0041>

such related industries as leisure and spirits, buying Bell Whiskey in 1985 and followed in 1986 by his purchase of the Distillers Company. While Saunders was ultimately imprisoned for five years for insider trading, the changes that he made were long-lasting and had a profound effect on those working at the brewery. Organizationally, the effect of Saunders' changes was a reconceptualization of work.

With the growth – in the late 1990s – of Guinness into Diageo, a multinational beverage firm that was steeped in the new managerial theories, management steadily dismantled the previous era's paternalism. Jobs were cut, rationalization measures were put in place, outsourcing began, and automation and internal markets took hold. There were no more free meals and beer for employees, whose numbers dropped from a peak of 1500 to just 78 by the time the plant was closed in 2005. Many of the workers who were interviewed remembered the 1980s and 1990s as a period of continuous change and insecurity. Gone were the days of embedded employment – i.e., a time when workers felt they had a grip on their jobs. Work became dis-embedded, leading to a loss of industrial culture and the structure of feelings that had once made workers satisfied and secure. Thus, while the Park Royal site was continuously brewing beer for nearly seventy years, the organization of the labour and “the assumptions surrounding it” were radically different in 2005 than they had been when the plant opened in 1936. (131)

While something might have been said about the role of race and gender at the brewery, this is a superb book. It shows the value of historical study and stands in stark contrast to the sociological accounts of sterile, desiccated working lives reported by theorists such as André Gorz, Zygmunt Bauman, and many others. The fast-paced, extremely readable narrative

along with the sensitive and sure-footed analysis of the material will attract educated and generally interested readers alike. The book shows that work matters in multiple ways, and for that reason alone, it deserves a wide readership.

MATTHEW J. BELLAMY
Carleton University

Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020)

SLAVE REVOLTS WERE dynamic, murky, and complicated, and in *Tacky's Revolt*, Vincent Brown shows us it was that and much more. His comprehensive study maps Jamaica's 1760–61 Slave Revolt(s), otherwise known as Tacky's Revolt, across the Atlantic world's martial cartography. Between April 1760 and September 1761, during the Seven Years War, over a thousand enslaved people known as the Coromantee in the British colony of Jamaica initiated several insurrections across the island. Contrary to the known history of the insurrection, Brown reveals that what scholars have understood as a single episode led by an enslaved man named Tacky was rather a collective series of revolts led by many insurgent protagonists as part of the larger Coromantee War in Jamaica. *Tacky's Revolt* frames slave revolt as a transatlantic genre of warfare, which he terms “slave war,” consisting of intersecting histories and odysseys linked together by a web of inter-Atlantic warfare between Africa, European empires, and the Americas.

Brown's central thesis contends that the 1760–61 Coromantee Slave War was a war within a network of many wars. He argues that it was simultaneously an extension of African warfare, a race war between European enslavers and enslaved Africans, a struggle between Africans over communal belonging, political

legacy, and territory, and a battle part of the larger Seven Years War. Enslaved in African wars on the Gold Coast and sold across the Atlantic, the Coromantee were warfare migrants that formed composite co-national communities in the Americas as a means of social rejuvenation to avert the threat of social death. Likewise, in drawing on Stephanie Camp's notion of rival geographies, Brown points to the ways the Coromantee charted their contours that mapped physical and symbolic boundaries of kinship, communal belonging, and affiliation across the colonial landscape. This rival geography and slave war laid siege to the British empire's most important military garrison in the Americas—Jamaica. In doing so, the 1760–61 Coromantee Slave War emerged simultaneously as a crucial battleground in the larger Seven Years War.

Scholars writing on colonial slavery in the black radical tradition, such as Cedric Robinson and W.E.B. Du Bois, have long argued that the slave trade was the link between the political history of the African wars, colonial development, and European economic growth. Drawing on this scholarship, Brown foregrounds Africa as an integral part in the making of slavery and the European empire. The emphasis on Africa sheds light on the importance of African peoples' political experiences and their role in the making of the diaspora in the Americas. While prior slavery scholars have considered the importance of African cultural history in the making of new world identities, Brown shifts our attention to diasporic political experiences shaped by the slave trade and African political history. As an Atlantic slavery scholar, then, Brown brings these insights to his framing of the slave revolt as a slave war by attending to the interconnected dynamics of slavery and Africa across space and empire.

The primary sources that form the backbone of this study are counter-insurgency

reports and correspondence produced by colonial officers and first-hand accounts from enslavers and colonists on the ground during the slave war. Like many other slavery scholars, Brown wrestles with and against archival silences and fragments that limit the recovery of enslaved peoples' voices, thoughts, and perspectives. Central to Brown's methodological approach is mapping the Revolt across the islands' physical geography. This cartographic approach allows him to draw out the rebels' possible aspirations, goals, and itineraries by tracing their movement across space. Brown's critical reading of contemporary historians Edward Long and Bryan Edwards is most impressive as well. He critically engages with them alongside his other textual archival sources, against the grain, to explore things the sources never meant to illustrate, and along the grain to note how these sources "constrain and shape our knowledge." (13) The result is that he demonstrates a persuasive approach in unveiling "plausible stories about the aspirations and strivings of the enslaved." (13)

The first three chapters foreground what Brown describes as the martial cartography of Atlantic slavery. Here, he draws connections between the slave trade, Africa, and the European empire in an entangled web of pan-Atlantic warfare and slavery, which all converge and shape the realities of colonial life in Jamaica. Persuasively, he shows how Coromantee political legacies of resistance in the Americas shed light on this martial geography that connected the Gold Coast to the Americas. Brown's reconstructed narrative and analysis of the Coromantee Slave War in the following two chapters explore and place it in this entangled pan-Atlantic martial cartography. Perhaps the strongest chapter – chapter six – looks at the economic, political, and cultural consequences of the slave war. Brown argues

that this slave war reverberated across the broader British Atlantic empire, where it “reshaped public life and lodged deeply in collective memory.” (209) This chapter will be of particular interest to scholars of the wider British Atlantic empire, early America, and colonization, as it sheds light on how the reverberation of slave revolt shaped conversations about race, empire, and abolition in the early modern world.

This study covers much ground, albeit with its limited discussion of gender. In chapter four, Brown notes that enslaved women represented 40% of the first known captured rebels in the initial parish uprising in April 1760. (151) Brown also gives two compelling accounts of one woman named Cubah, whom the Coromantee in Kingston raised to the status of queen, and another named Mary, whom colonial officials sentenced to transportation to British Honduras. However, given Brown’s methodological focus on tracing the individual “itineraries and odysseys” of the Revolt’s many participants and agents, one would expect a more thorough engagement with those enslaved women who indeed played an important role in the making of the slave war throughout the analysis. Nevertheless, Brown’s bringing these gendered aspects of the Revolt to our attention indeed points to *Tacky’s Revolt’s* success in generating interest and opening new avenues of research into the subject.

Comprehensively, *Tacky’s Revolt* is innovative and insightful, introducing readers to new ways of thinking about slave revolts and the Atlantic history of slavery. While slavery scholars have conventionally examined slave revolts as “local studies,” Brown pushes us to understand slave revolts as a genre of warfare whose implications and consequences charted across and simultaneously drew its roots from the currents of a broader pan-Atlantic

world. His cartographic methodology successfully poses exciting and thought-provoking questions that certainly expand how we understand slave revolt as a slave war. We see this in chapter three, where he foregrounds the 1760–61 Coromantee Slave War in a more extended genealogy of Coromantee politics and resistance across the Atlantic. Indeed, notable Coromantee slave revolts occurred in New York, Antigua, St. Johns, and Jamaica throughout the 18th century. However, the main takeaway or highlight of this study is the recasting of slave revolt as slave war in a broader interconnected web of linkages that draws on the Atlantic entanglements of Africa, Europe, and the Americas. This well-researched study has far-reaching implications for scholars of slavery, empire, and resistance and will prove to be of great value to a wide range of scholars.

CLIFTON E. SORRELL III
University of Texas

Michele Fazio, Christie Launius, and Tim Strangleman, eds., *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2021)

THE *ROUTLEDGE International Handbook of Working-Class Studies* is a colossal tome. Its 544 pages comprise 43 chapters from 42 different contributors and are organized along with six broad themes, touching on questions of method and principles of research, class, education, work, community, working-class cultures, representations of the working class, activism, and collective action. In their introduction, the editors position the volume as both an up-to-date account of the present state of the field and a vision of working-class studies moving forward. In doing so, they are careful to characterize the field as a ‘big umbrella’