Gunvor Simonsen, *Slave Stories: Law, Representation, and Gender in the Danish West Indies*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2017. i + 245 pp. (Paper US\$50.00)

Scholarly works on slave testimonies in Caribbean courts are quite sparse due to the scarcity of sources. Gunvor Simonsen Associate Professor of the Saxo-Institute of Archaeology, Ethnology, Greek and Latin History in Denmark, acknowledges that the history of slave laws and court case materials in the Danish West Indies has rarely been discussed in the literature. Yet there are 190 large volumes of testimonies of the enslaved, all recorded by royal judges and scribes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the Rigsarkiv, the National Archives in Copenhagen. The words of the enslaved had an enormous impact on Danish colonial legal institutions.

Simonsen begins by introducing the diverse gendered regimes that judges and slaves encountered and had to maneuver, and delves into the impact these regimes had on the nature of their legal dispositions. These regimes included monogamous Christian married life, the polygenic nature of African-Atlantic spirituality, and what the judges considered the overly sexual and perverse dispositions of enslaved Africans.

Despite the benefits these testimonies have for slavery and Atlantic research, it is important to recognize that they were distorted, with some parts ignored and others highlighted and retold in numerous ways that not only changed the quality of the statements but ensured that they would not be understood in the intended manner. Although research on slave testimonies is beneficial for scholarship, these various biases and inaccuracies diminish its value. Scholars must therefore read these recorded testimonies with caution.

The book discusses the importance and power of words left behind. Simonsen concedes that although slave testimonies provide insight into the lives and legal experiences of slaves, their alteration by judges and scribes also enables those words to lose their impact, signifying the strength of the colonial legal regime and its correlation with its European progenitor. Such regimes, while upholding the inclusion of slave testimonies, were nevertheless severely repressive. The counterpoint of inclusivity and repression permeates the book, illuminating the fact that while slaves took the opportunity to share their stories, colonial judges were then able to pass harsh sentences based on these very testimonies.

Slave Stories provides a depiction and thorough examination of the intricacies of these slave testimonies, revealing the complex, muddled implications of their existence. The courtroom exploration of sexual violence and the injustices involved allowed enslaved women to find their voices and expose their

European assailants. The dominance of themes of misogynistic authorities emerges in such cases of sexual violence, especially those presided over by the infamous police judge Frederiksen. Additionally, the labelling of manliness, or the lack thereof, in the testimonies of enslaved men concerning domestic matters illustrates the stereotypes applied to Afro-Caribbean men.

Frederiksen, a major figure in this book, was the sitting judge in a number of the slave testimonies and added to the gendered and sexualized focus placed on witnesses. The exceptions to heavily sexualized themes occurred within the domestic cases tried by the Christiansted courts, where Western emphasis on domestic space and fidelity clashed with Afro-Caribbean ideals of conjugality and family life that slaves held. Moreover, the enslaved witnesses gave testimony about domestic life, influenced by their African backgrounds, that was very different from ideas held by their colonial masters, who emphasized their status as slaves.

This book is a useful addition to legal discourse on the history of Caribbean slave regimes, particularly in that it covers a geographical and linguistic area that has been largely ignored. Despite all the biases embedded in the recording and interpretation of these testimonies, accounts of this nature are welcome for bettering our understanding of Caribbean slavery.

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