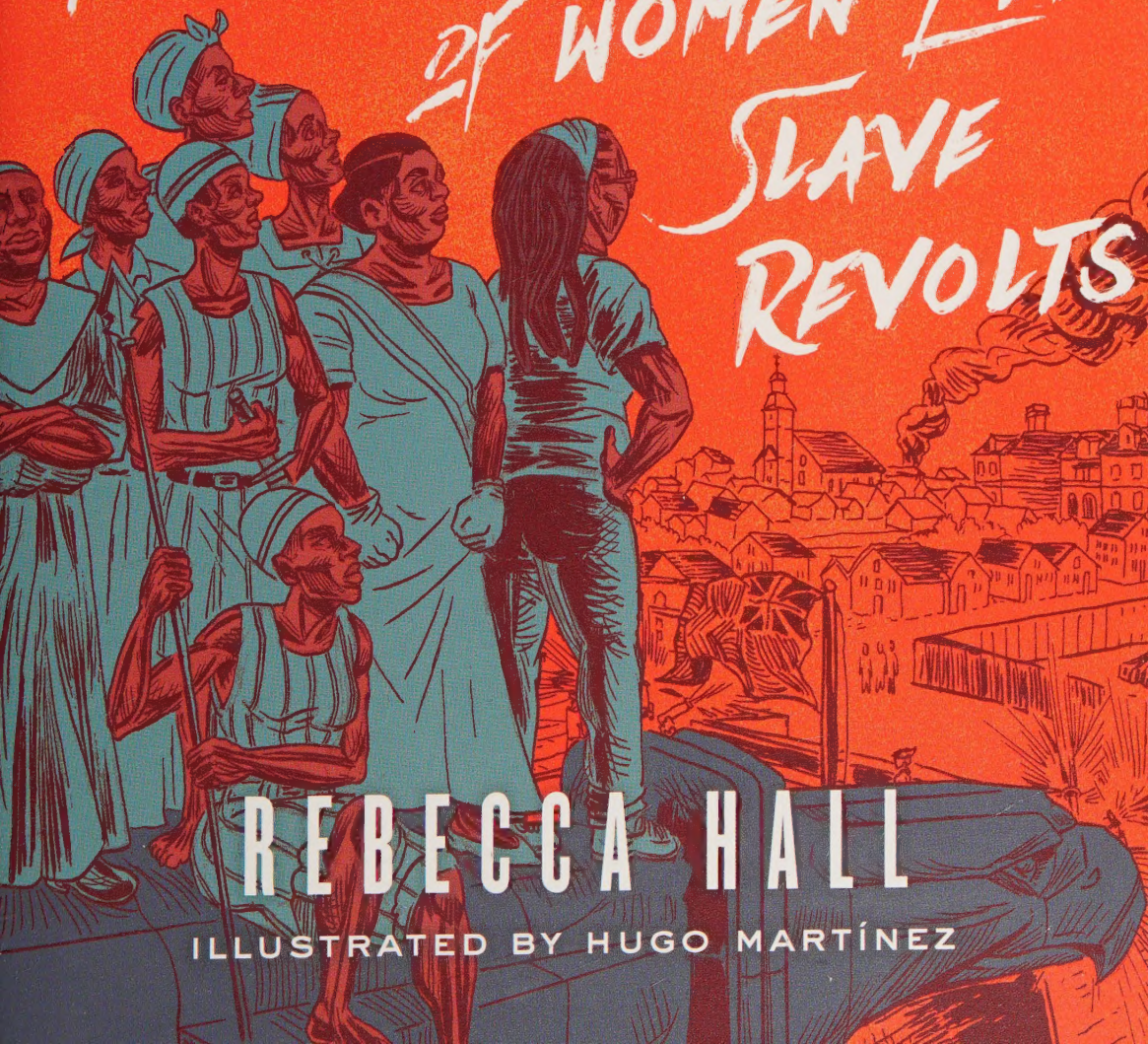


WAKE

THE HIDDEN HISTORY
OF WOMEN-LED
SLAVE
REVOLTS



REBECCA HALL

ILLUSTRATED BY HUGO MARTÍNEZ

Part graphic novel, part memoir, *Wake* is an imaginative tour de force that tells the story of women-led slave revolts and chronicles scholar Rebecca Hall's efforts to uncover the truth about these warriors who, until now, have been left out of the historical record.

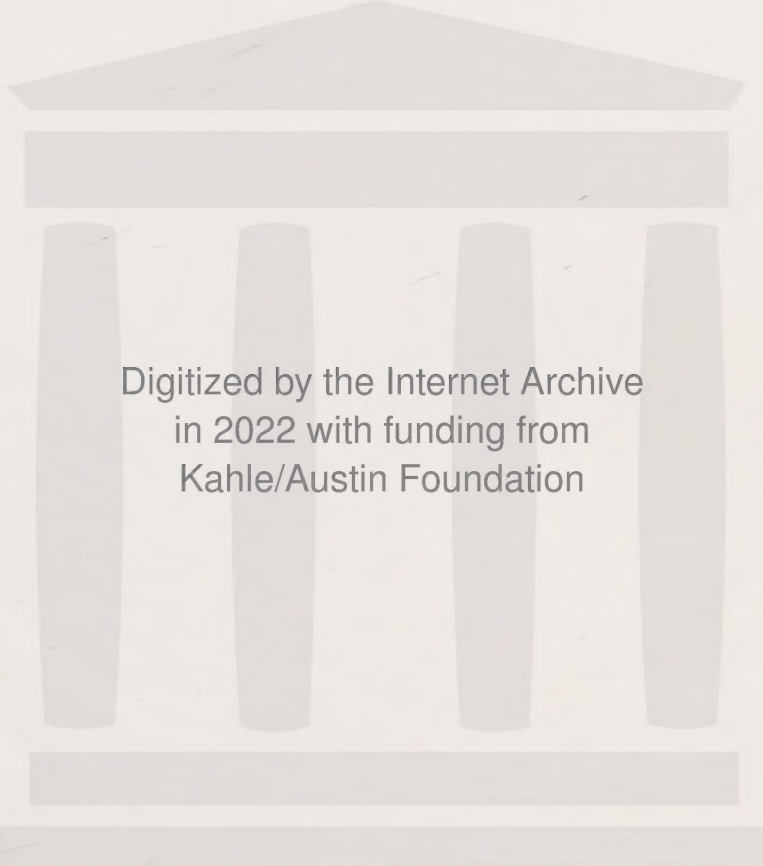
Women warriors planned and led slave revolts on ships during the Middle Passage. They fought their enslavers throughout the Americas. And then they were erased from history.

Wake tells the story of Dr. Rebecca Hall, a historian, granddaughter of slaves, and woman haunted by the legacy of slavery. The accepted history of slave revolts has always told her that enslaved women took a back seat to men in fighting for freedom. But Rebecca decides to look deeper, and her journey takes her through old court records, slave ship captains' logs, crumbling correspondence, and even the forensic evidence from the bones of enslaved women from the "African burial ground" uncovered in Manhattan. She finds women warriors everywhere.

Using in-depth archival research and a measured approach to historical imagination, Rebecca constructs the likely pasts of women rebels who fought for freedom during the Middle Passage, as well as the stories of women who led slave revolts in colonial New York. We also follow Rebecca's own story as the legacy of slavery shapes her life, both during her time as an attorney and later as a historian seeking the past that haunts her.

The exploration of both a personal and national legacy, *Wake* is a powerful reminder that while the past is gone, we still live in its wake.

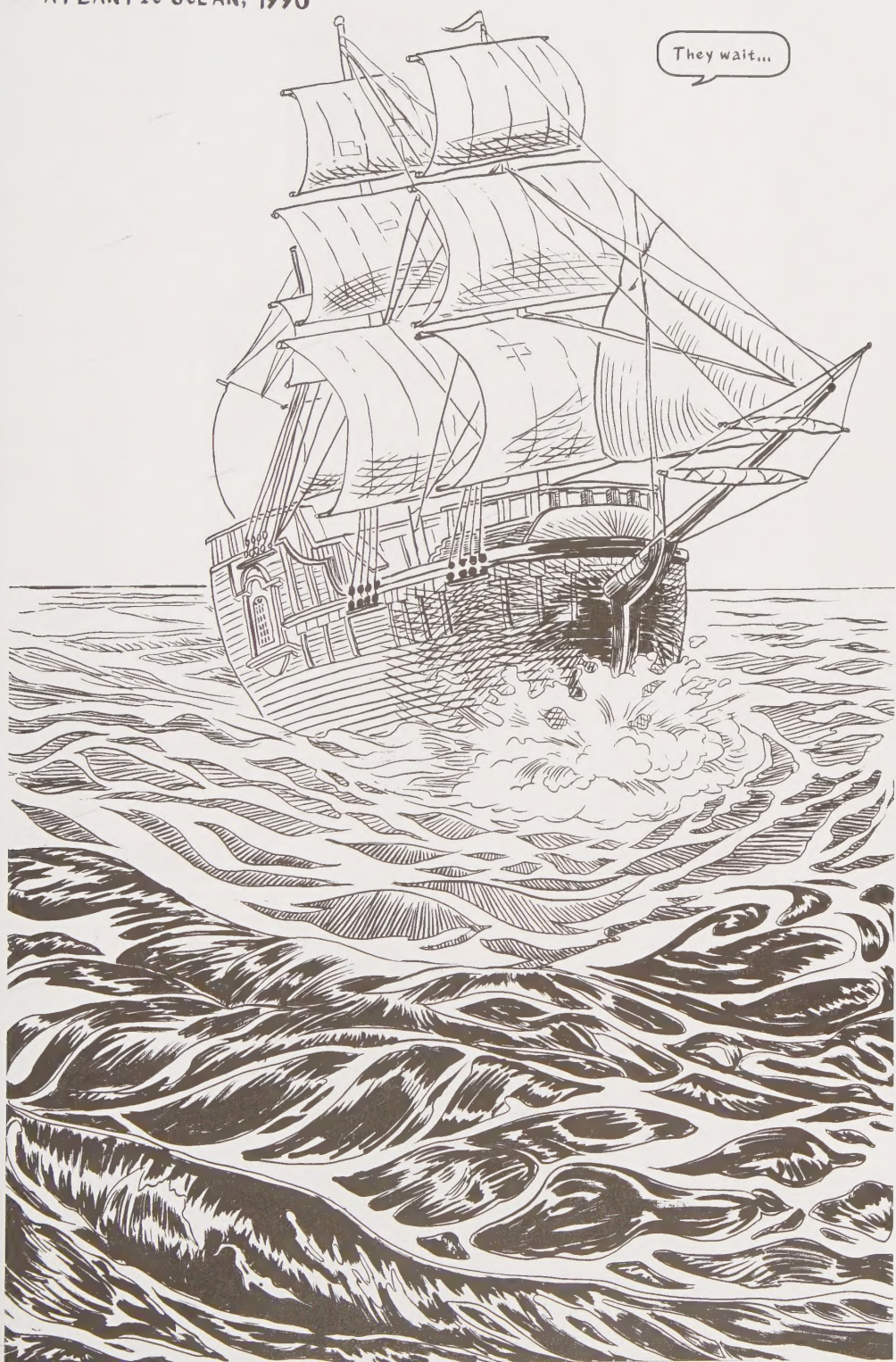




Digitized by the Internet Archive
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ATLANTIC OCEAN, 1770

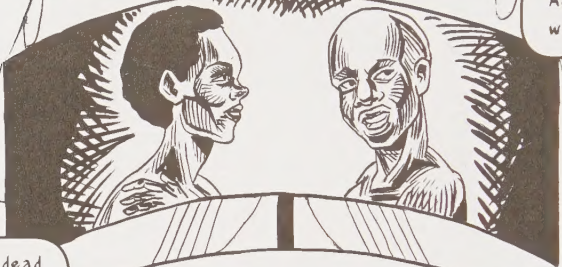
They wait...



... for our signal.



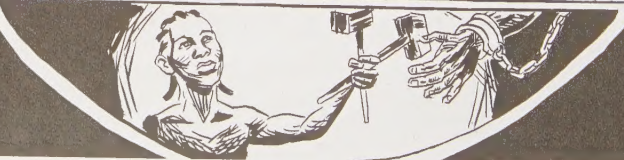
Adono—you know we will die here.



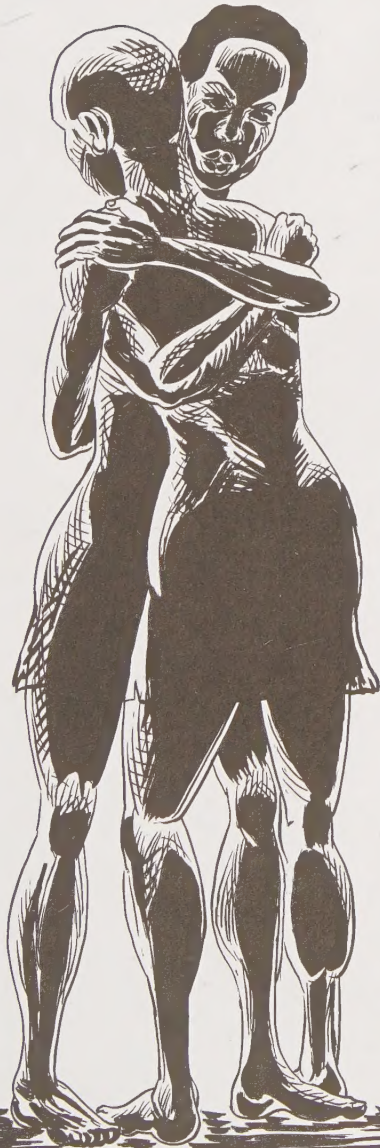
We are dead already, Alele.



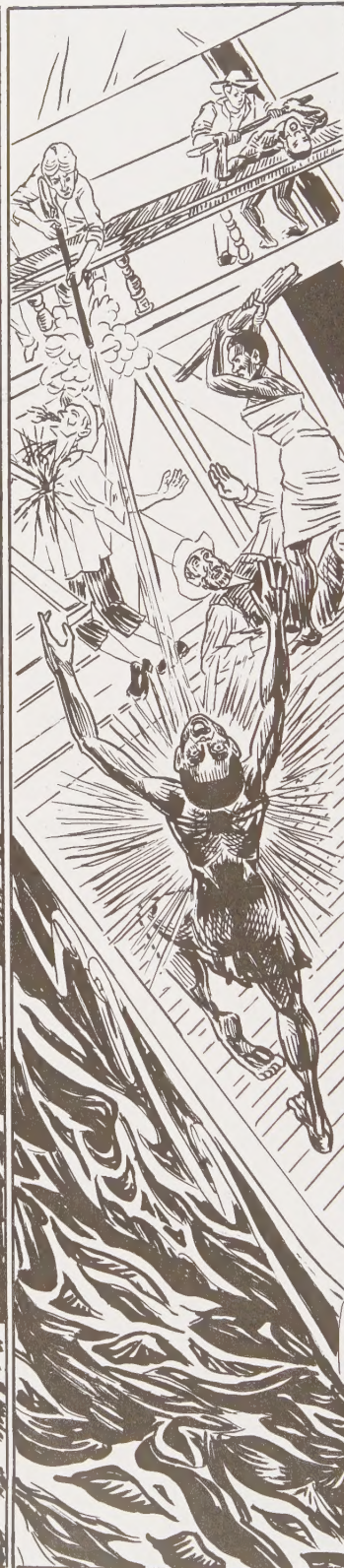
At least let us die together.

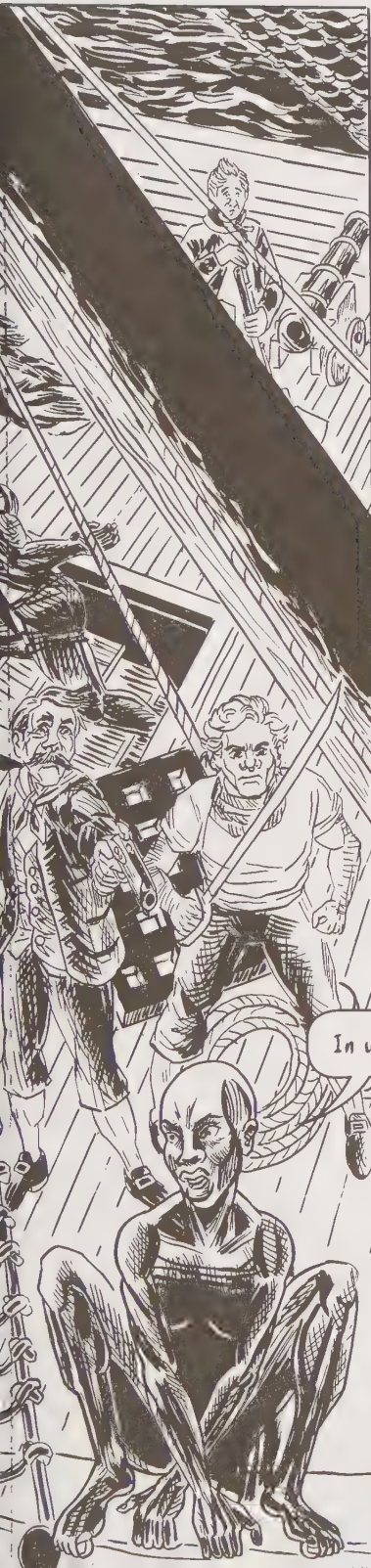


In UNITY!



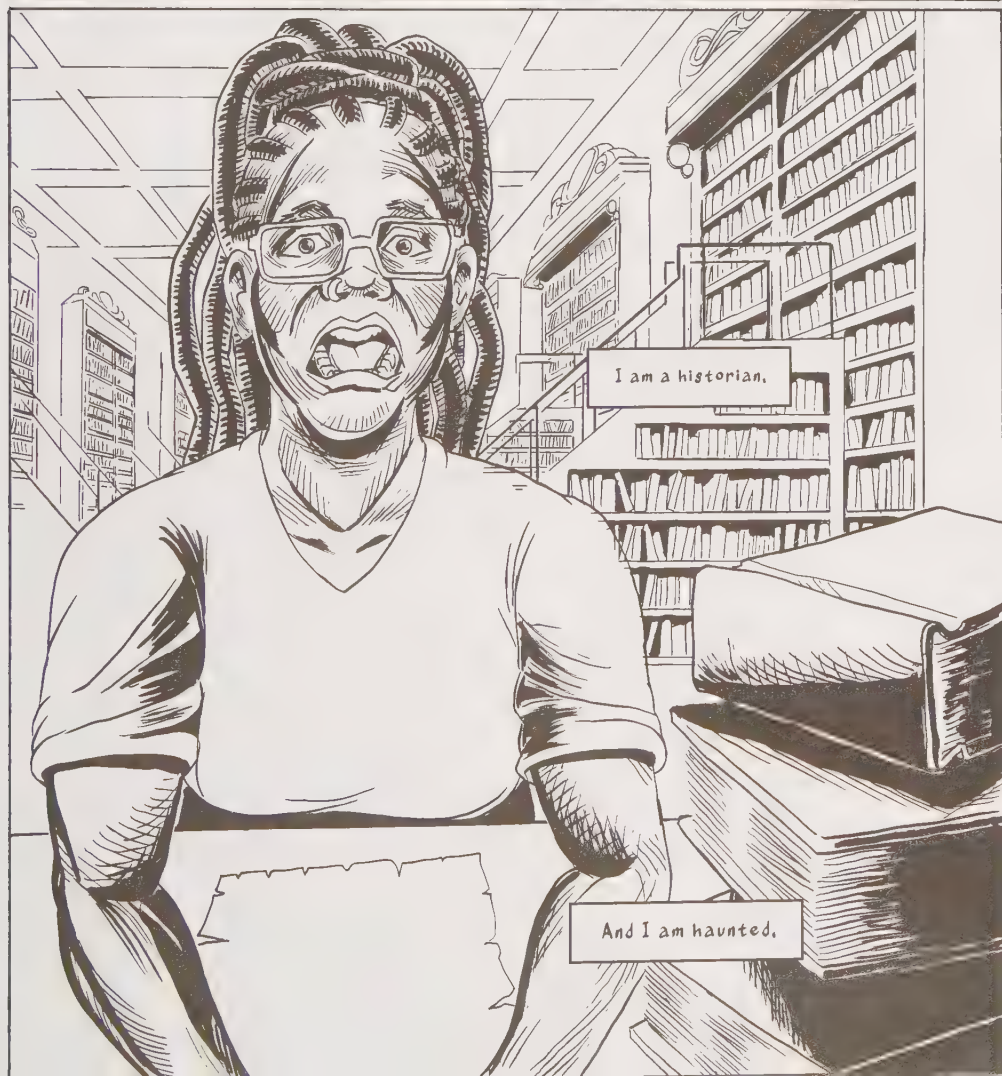


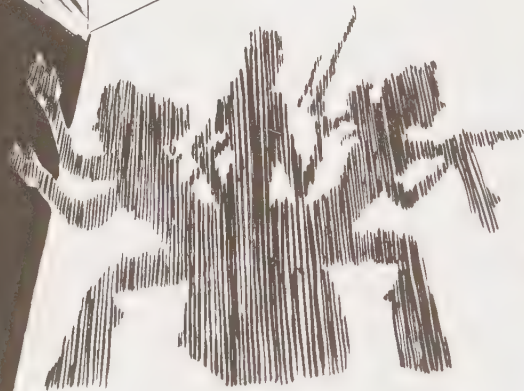
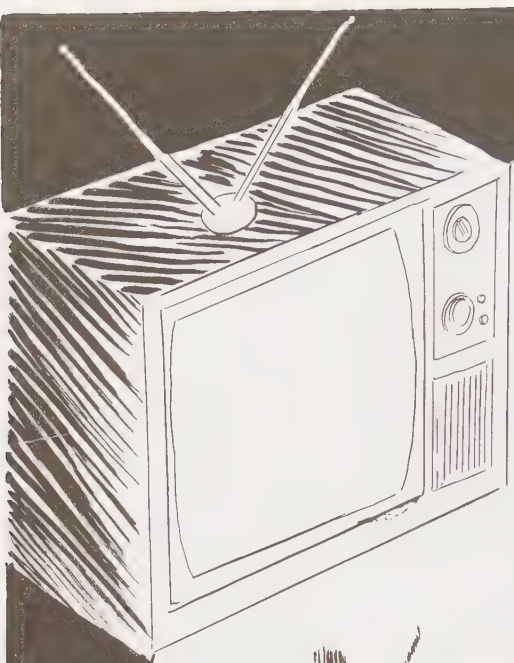




In unity.







As far back as
I can remember,
I've been searching
for women warriors.

Pickings were slim.





Lloyds
 Lloyds of LONDON,
 Have insured against invasion
 of cargo for the amount of 1000z

(In planning his revolt) Gabriel
 chose no women. Women
 of African descent inhabited
 a separate domestic sphere
 in the New World, just as
 they had in the Old.

**Barbot on
 Guinea**
 The writings of Jean Barbot
 on West Africa.
 1678-1712

**ROLL,
 JORDAN,
 ROLL**
 THE WORLD
 THE SLAVES MADE
 EUGENE D. GENOVESE

**ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY
 SLAVE SHIP LOGS**

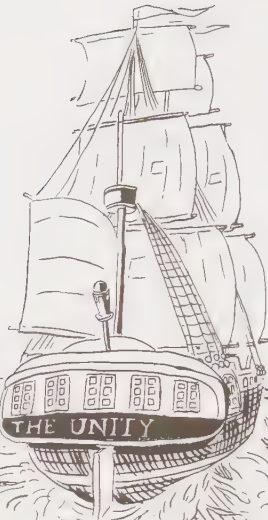
Jan	1768	Jan	1769
Feb	1768	Feb	1769
Mar	1769	Mar	1770
Apr	1769	Apr	1770
May	1769	May	1770
Jun	1769	Jun	1770
Jul	1769	Jul	1770
Aug	1769	Aug	1770
Sep	1769	Sep	1770
Oct	1769	Oct	1770
Nov	1769	Nov	1770
Dec	1769	Dec	1770

For hundreds of years,
 our ancestors were brutally
 silenced. I wasn't supposed
 to find their voices.



But sometimes, when
 you think you're hunting
 down the past...

the past is
hunting you...



ROYAL AFRICAN COMPANY
SLAVE SHIP LOGS

Sam	1768	Unity	1768
Thomas	1768	Diana	1771
Mary	1769	Chun	1771
1769	Esper		



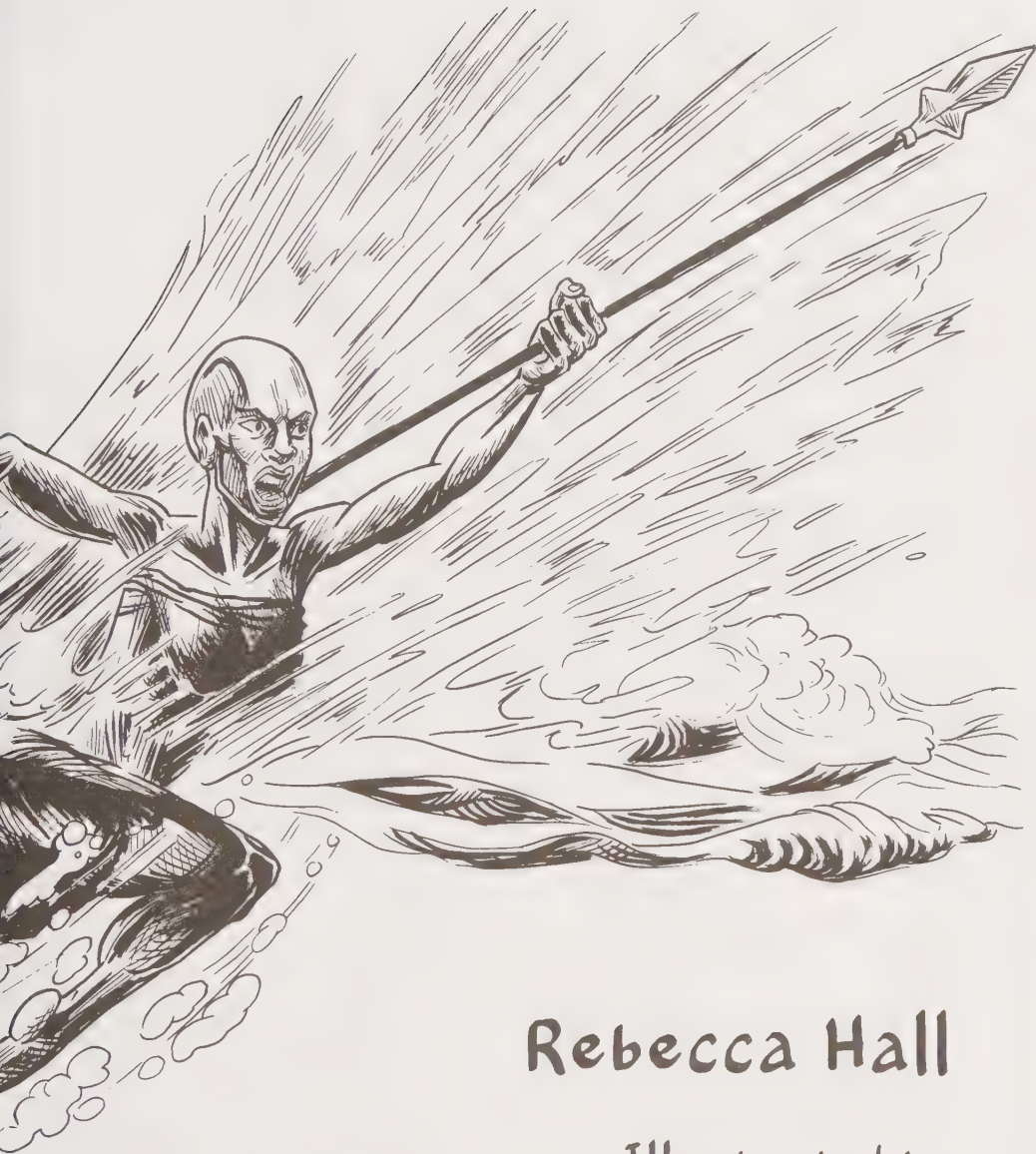
I was born to
tell these
stories.



WAKE

The Hidden History of
Women-Led Slave Revolts





Rebecca Hall

Illustrated by
Hugo Martinez

Lettered by Sarula Bao

Simon & Schuster

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI



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

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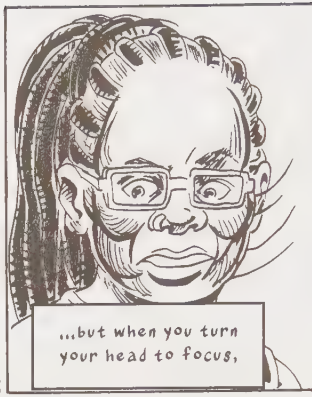
ISBN 978-1-9821-1518-0

ISBN 978-1-9821-1520-3 (ebook)

NEW YORK CITY, 1999

Chapter 1
Coming Home





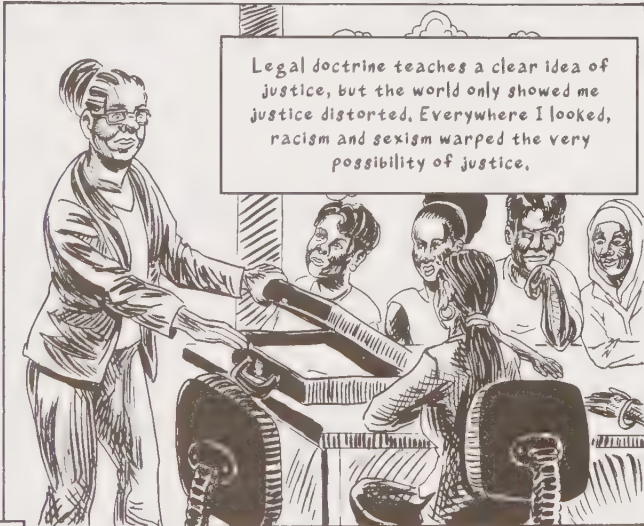
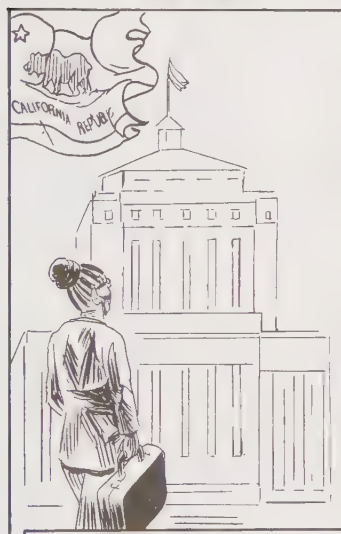
it's gone?





I grew up in this city, but I left New York a long time ago to go to law school at Berkeley. I was a tenant's rights attorney for eight years.

I believed even then that justice had to be fought for.

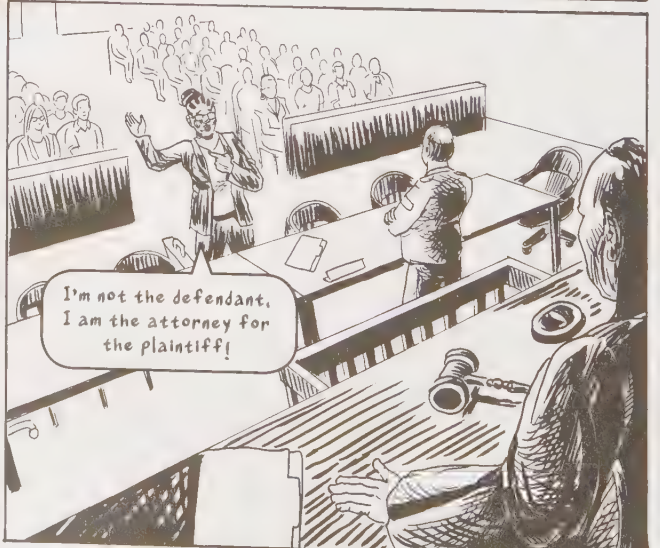


Legal doctrine teaches a clear idea of justice, but the world only showed me justice distorted. Everywhere I looked, racism and sexism warped the very possibility of justice.

For example, I would see my Black women plaintiffs get half the money damages awarded to them that my white women plaintiffs would get in the very same case.



The latest research on juries shows—look, I don't know how else to say this, but you need to act like white women on the stand. You have to show your vulnerability, show your pain!!

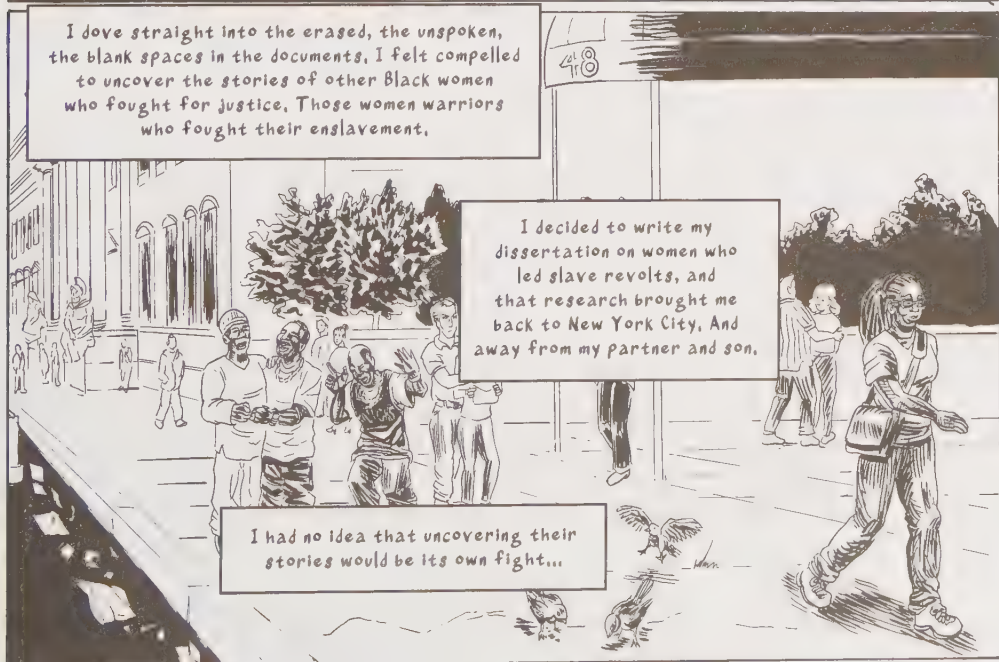




I could "win" these cases for my clients, But I felt the need to see underneath the "justice system"—to get at the root of what was warping the world.



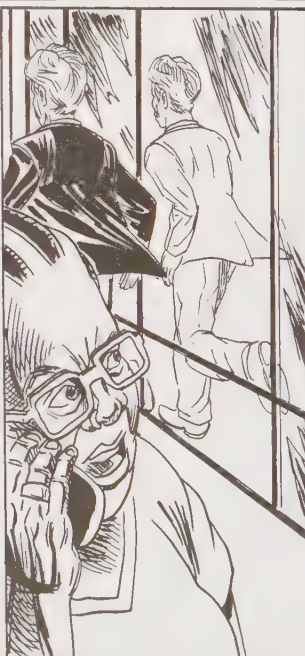
So I went back to school to get a PhD in history. I studied the history of race and gender in America. And it became clear to me that in order to understand our experience as Black women today, I had to study slavery.



I dove straight into the erased, the unspoken, the blank spaces in the documents, I felt compelled to uncover the stories of other Black women who fought for justice. Those women warriors who fought their enslavement.

I decided to write my dissertation on women who led slave revolts, and that research brought me back to New York City, And away from my partner and son.

I had no idea that uncovering their stories would be its own fight...



Huge piles of paper everywhere.
No organization, No index.

Even growing up here, I never
learned about this history.



So how are you supposed to find anything?

Oh, it's like anything in this work—needles in haystacks.

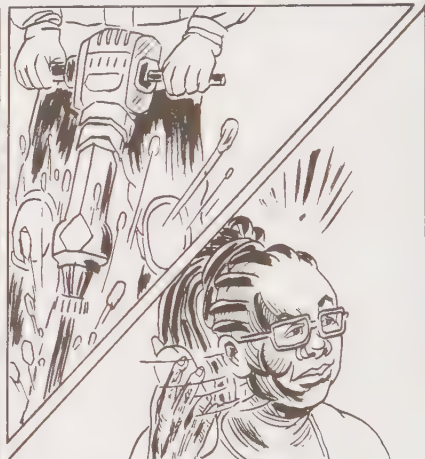
Well, I hope you find it and come back soon. We miss you!



Kiss the little guy for me.

Love you, Sweetie.

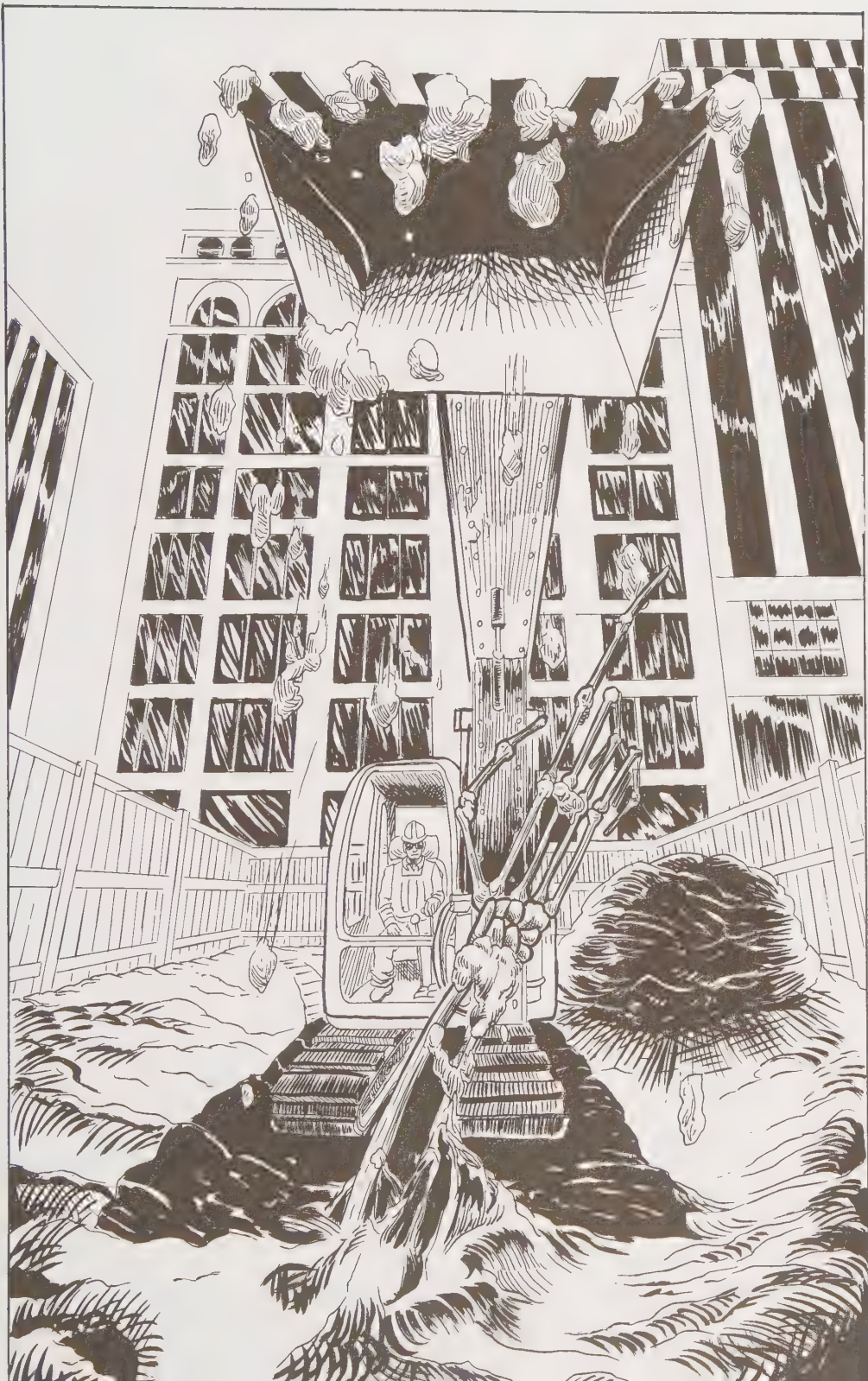
But New York City was built on slavery and the slave trade.



And as I dug into the history of my hometown...

**TED WEISS
FEDERAL
BUILDING UNDER
CONSTRUCTION**

...I began to see it everywhere.



Chapter 2

Dom Regina vs. Negro Slaves

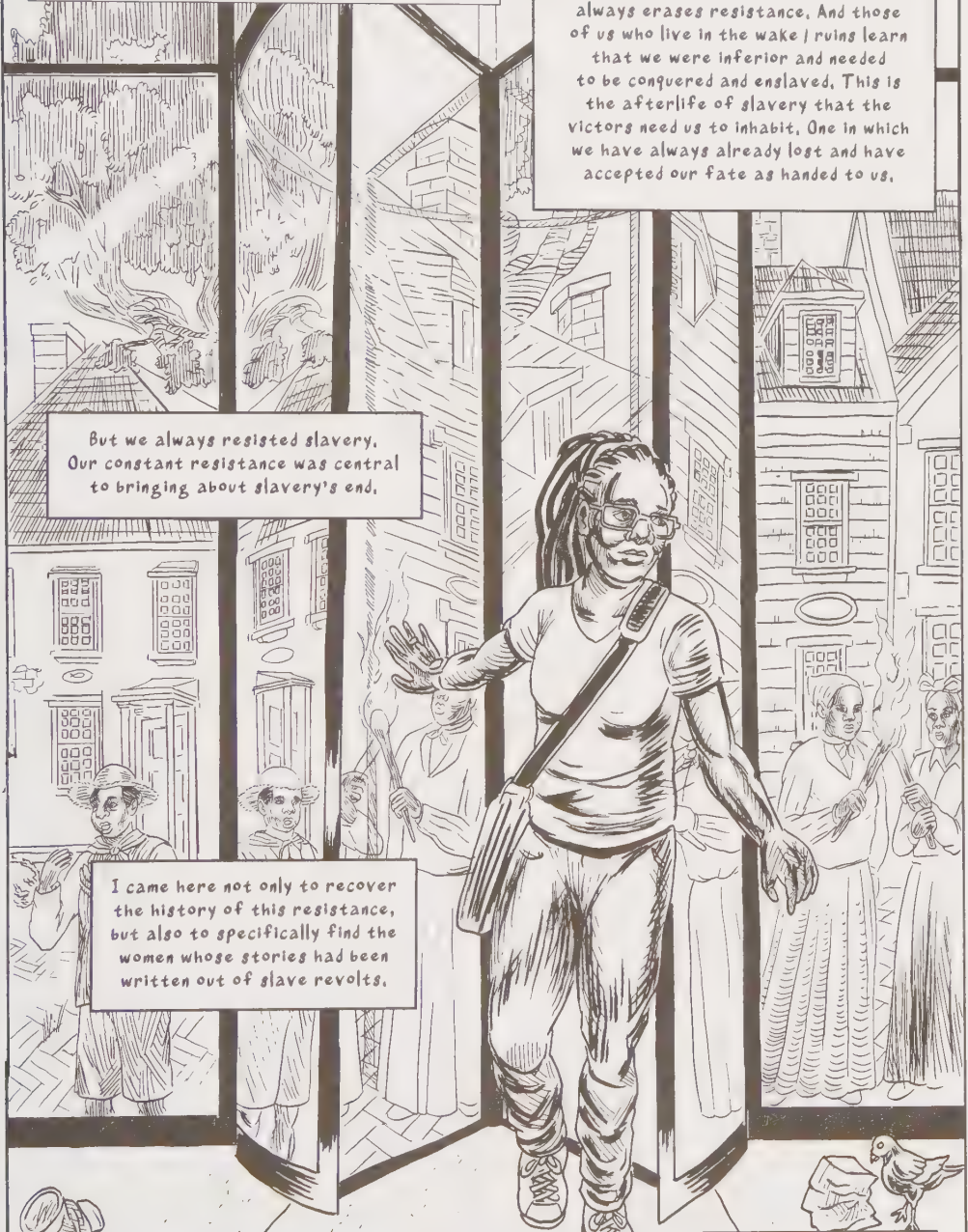
History written by the victors always erases resistance. And those of us who live in the wake / ruins learn that we were inferior and needed to be conquered and enslaved. This is the afterlife of slavery that the victors need us to inhabit. One in which we have always already lost and have accepted our 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 / 1712

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.

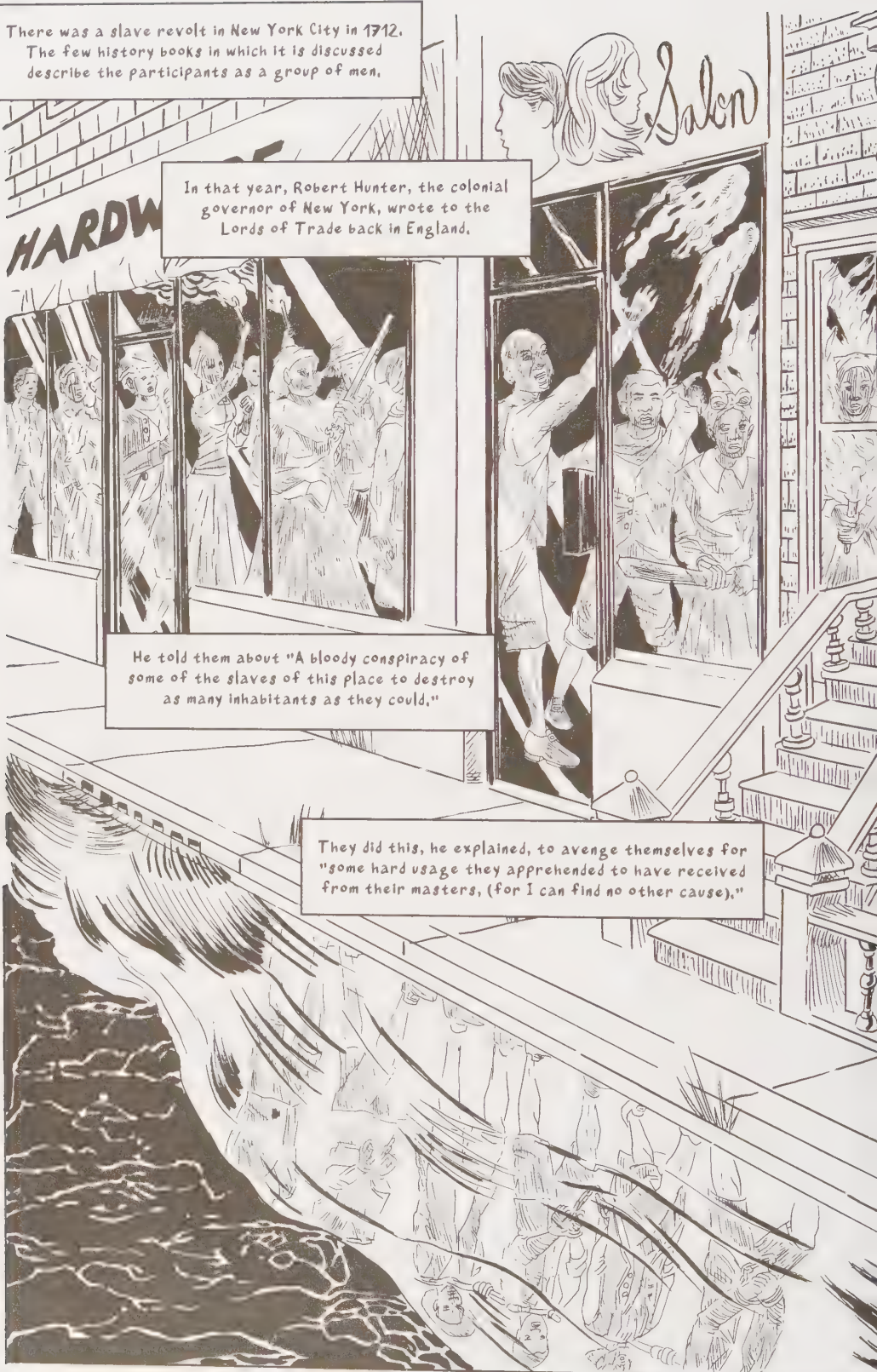


There was a slave revolt in New York City in 1712.
The few history books in which it is discussed
describe the participants as a group of men.

In that year, Robert Hunter, the colonial
governor of New York, wrote to the
Lords 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 sucking ye blood of each other's hand," they planned a revolt, which took place in April.

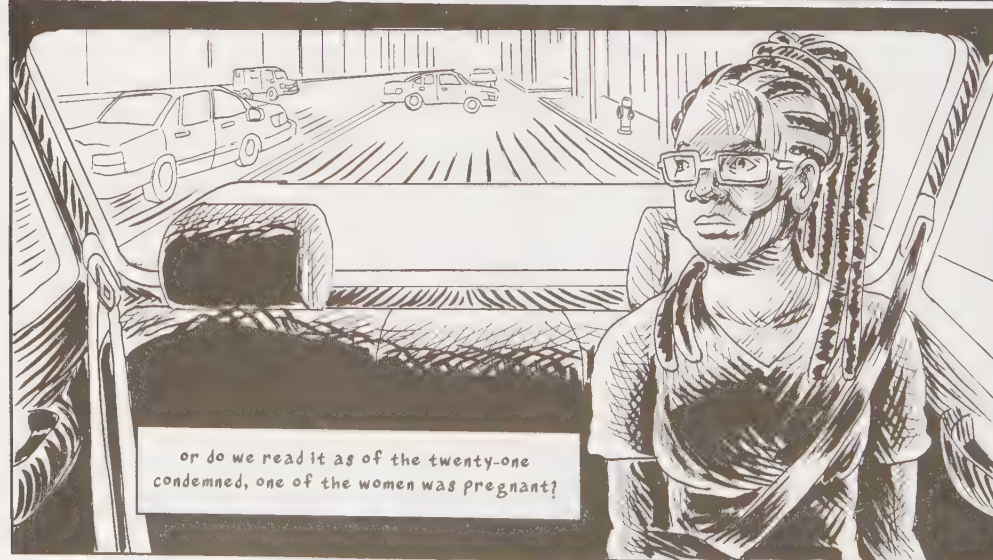
They burned down a building and then shot the white people who came to extinguish the fire, and then fled. The governor called on the militia to "drive the island" and claimed to the Lords that "we found all that put the design in execution, six of these having first laid violent hands upon themselves."



After the trial, twenty-seven were "condemned, whereof twenty-one were executed, one being a woman with child, her execution by that means suspended."



Of the twenty-one sentenced to death, do we read this as one was a woman,



or do we read it as of the twenty-one condemned, one of the women was pregnant?

NEW YORK CITY MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES

These documents didn't give me enough information about enslaved women who might have been involved in this revolt, so I have come to look at the original court records at the Municipal Archives.

I find four women among those tried: Sarah, Abigail, Lily, Amba.

Who were these women?

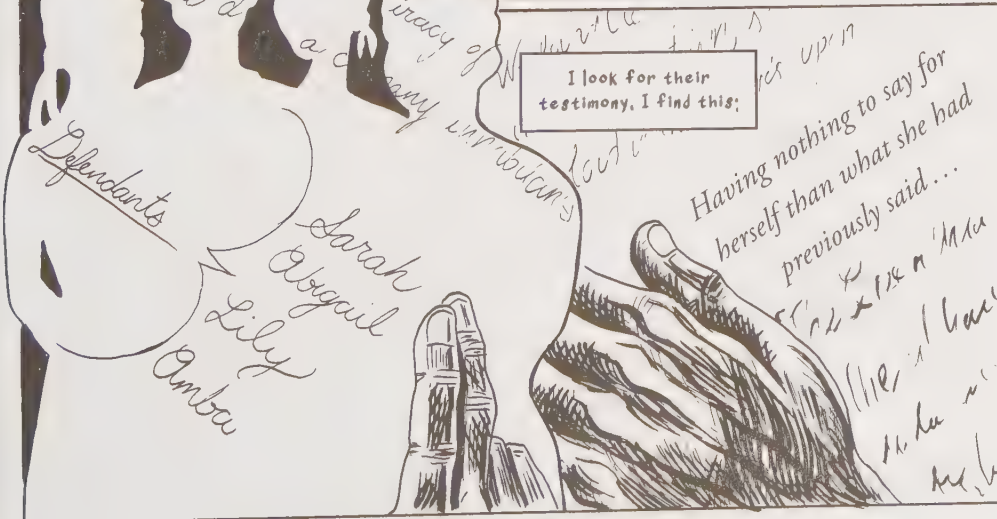
What do the trial records reveal about their actions, their motivations...

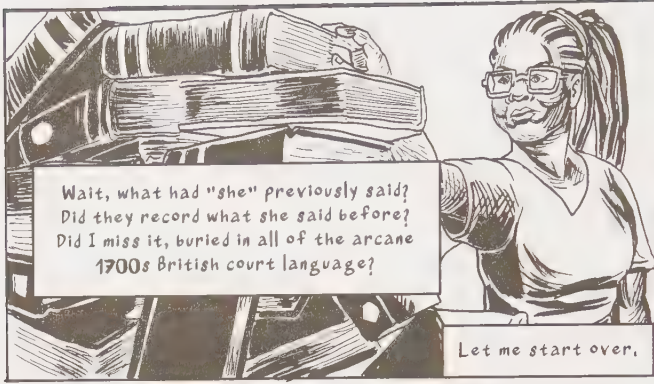
...the decisions they made and why they made them?

I look for their testimony, I find this:

Having nothing to say for herself than what she had previously said...

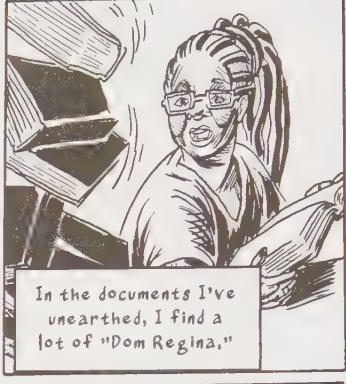
Defendants
Sarah
Abigail
Lily
Amba





Wait, what had "she" previously said? Did they record what she said before? Did I miss it, buried in all of the arcane 1700s British court language?

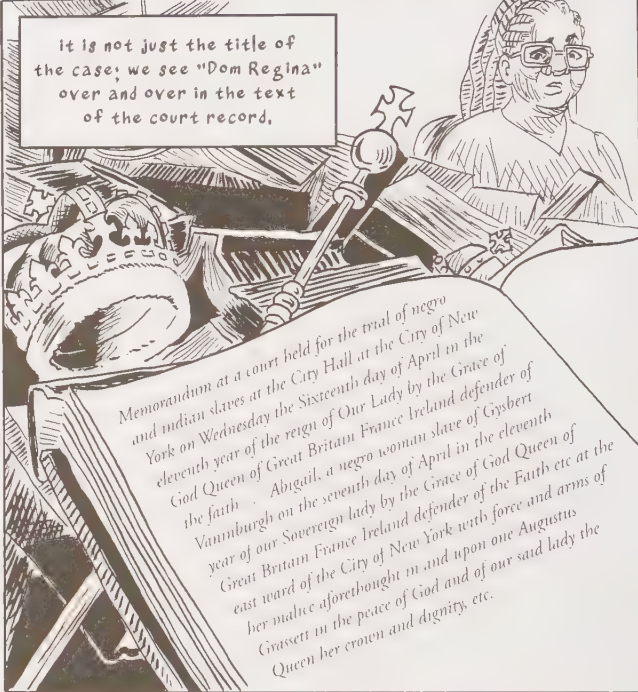
Let me start over.



In the documents I've unearthed, I find a lot of "Dom Regina,"

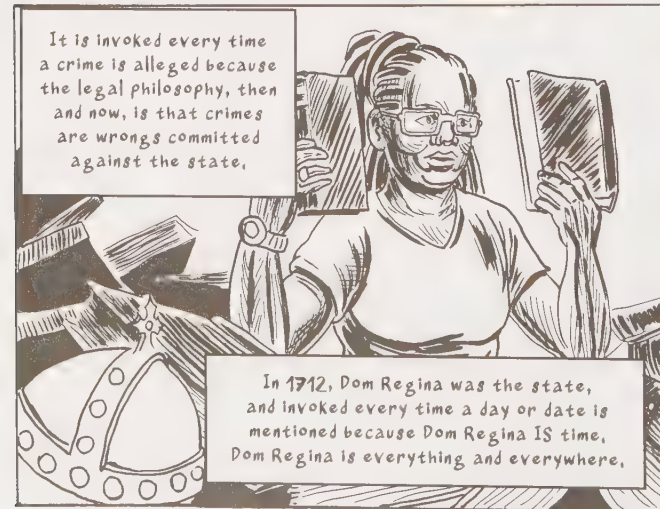


That means "the queen." Because New York was still a British colony,



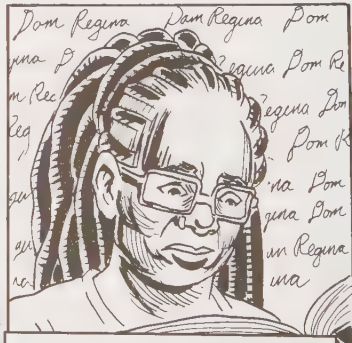
it is not just the title of the case; we see "Dom Regina" over and over in the text of the court record.

Memorandum at a court held for the trial of negro and indian slaves at the City Hall at the City of New York on Wednesday the Sixteenth day of April in the eleventh year of the reign of Our Lady by the Grace of God Queen of Great Britain France Ireland defender of the faith . . . Abigail, a negro woman slave of Gysbert Vanburgh on the seventh day of April in the eleventh year of our Sovereign lady by the Grace of God Queen of Great Britain France Ireland defender of the Faith etc at the east ward of the City of New York with force and arms of her majtie aforethought in and upon one Augustus Gusssett in the peace of God and of our said lady the Queen her crown and dignity, etc.

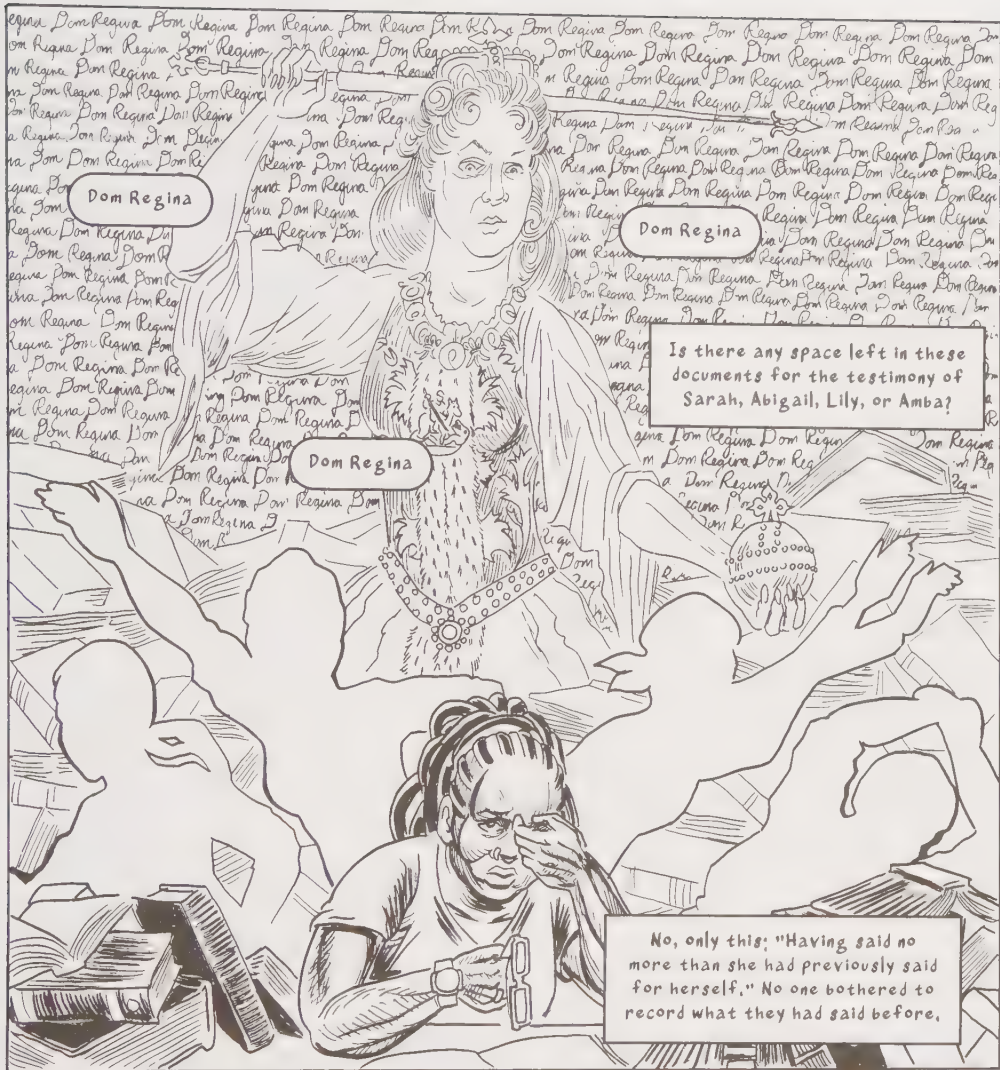


It is invoked every time a crime is alleged because the legal philosophy, then and now, is that crimes are wrongs committed against the state.

In 1712, Dom Regina was the state, and invoked every time a day or date is mentioned because Dom Regina IS time, Dom Regina is everything and everywhere.



It feels like a playground bully who tells you over and over again that he is the strongest in order to make it true. And in a way, it is that. This is how language creates power.



Dom Regina

Dom Regina

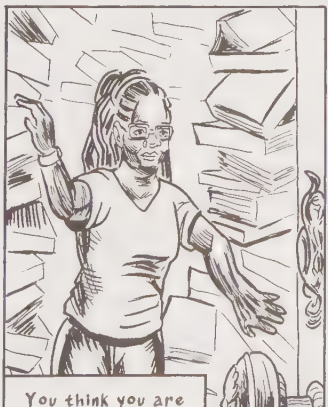
Dom Regina

Is there any space left in these documents for the testimony of Sarah, Abigail, Lily, or Amba?

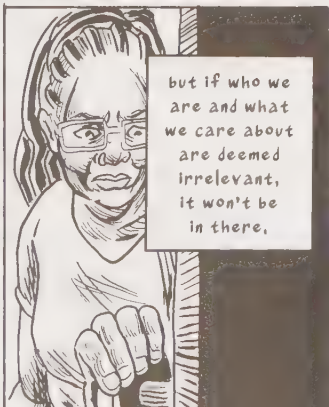
No, only this: "Having said no more than she had previously said for herself." No one bothered to record what they had said before,



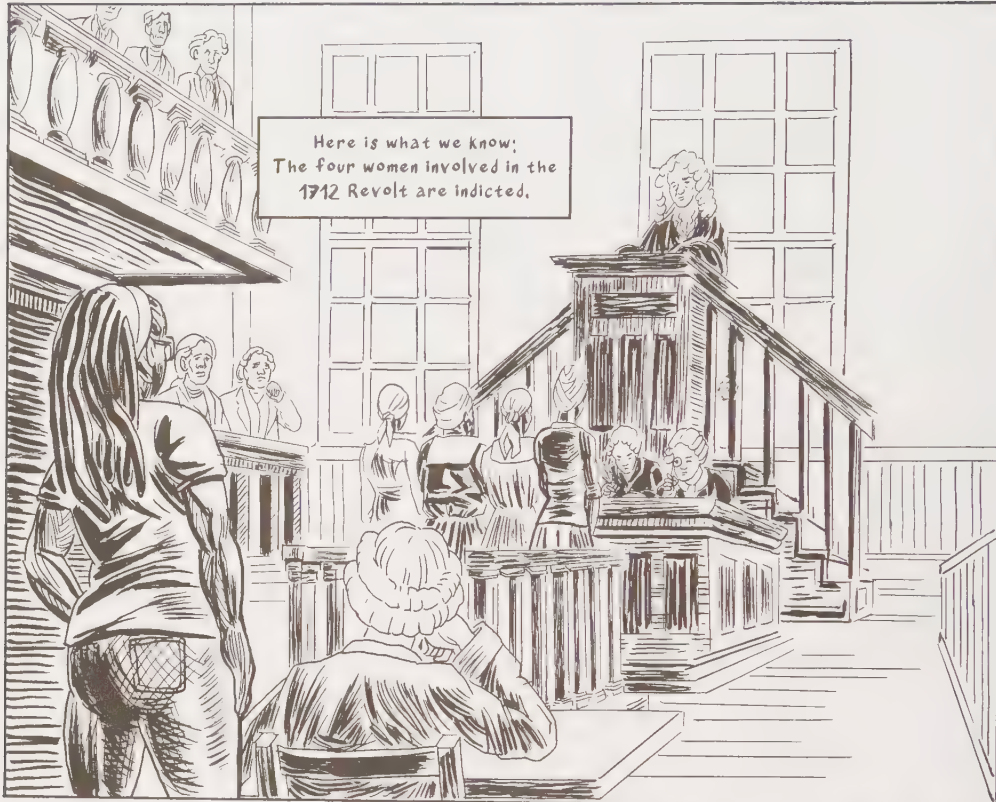
This is one way history erases us. What we had to say was not even considered important enough to record.



You think you are reading an accurate chronicle written at the time,



but if who we are and what we care about are deemed irrelevant, it won't be in there.



Here is what we know:
The four women involved in the
1712 Revolt are indicted.



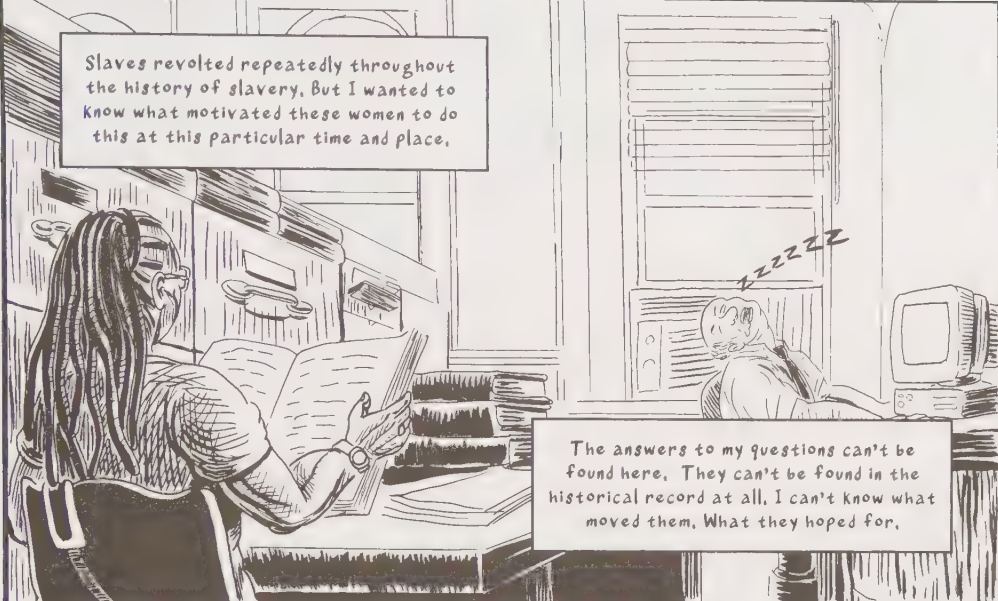
They are tried.



Sarah and Abigail are found
guilty and sentenced to death.



Lily and Amba are
found not guilty.



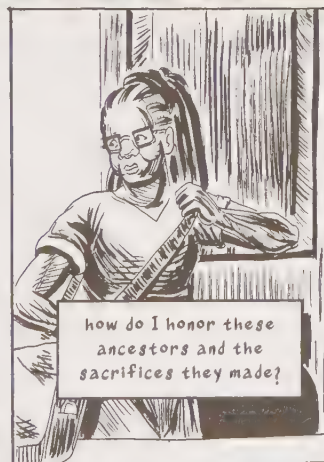
Slaves revolted repeatedly throughout the history of slavery. But I wanted to know what motivated these women to do this at this particular time and place.

zzzzzz

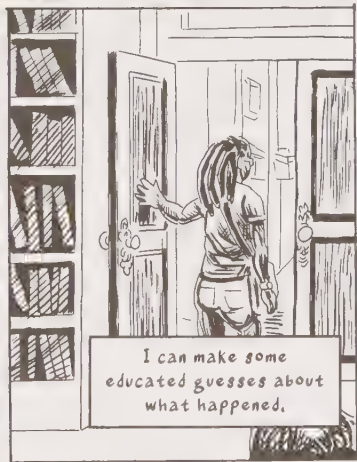
The answers to my questions can't be found here. They can't be found in the historical record at all. I can't know what moved them. What they hoped for.



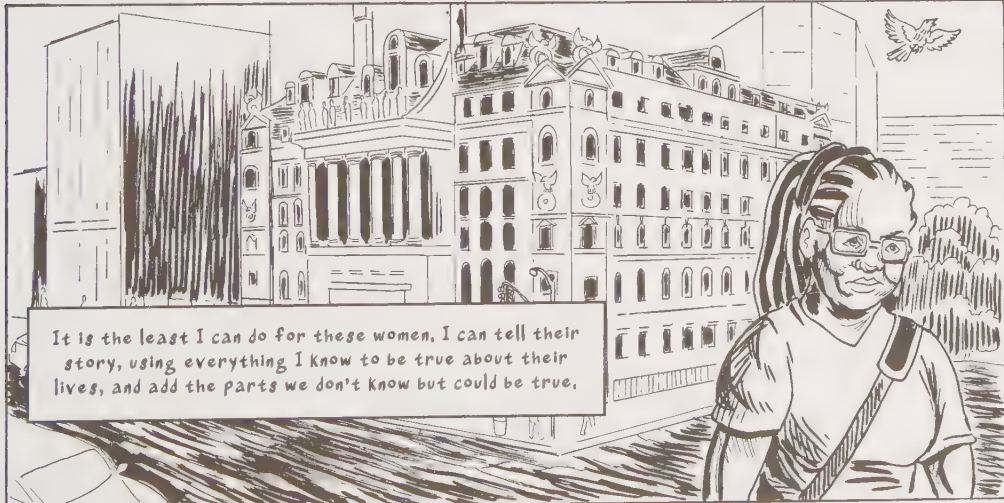
As a historian of slavery in British America,



how do I honor these ancestors and the sacrifices they made?



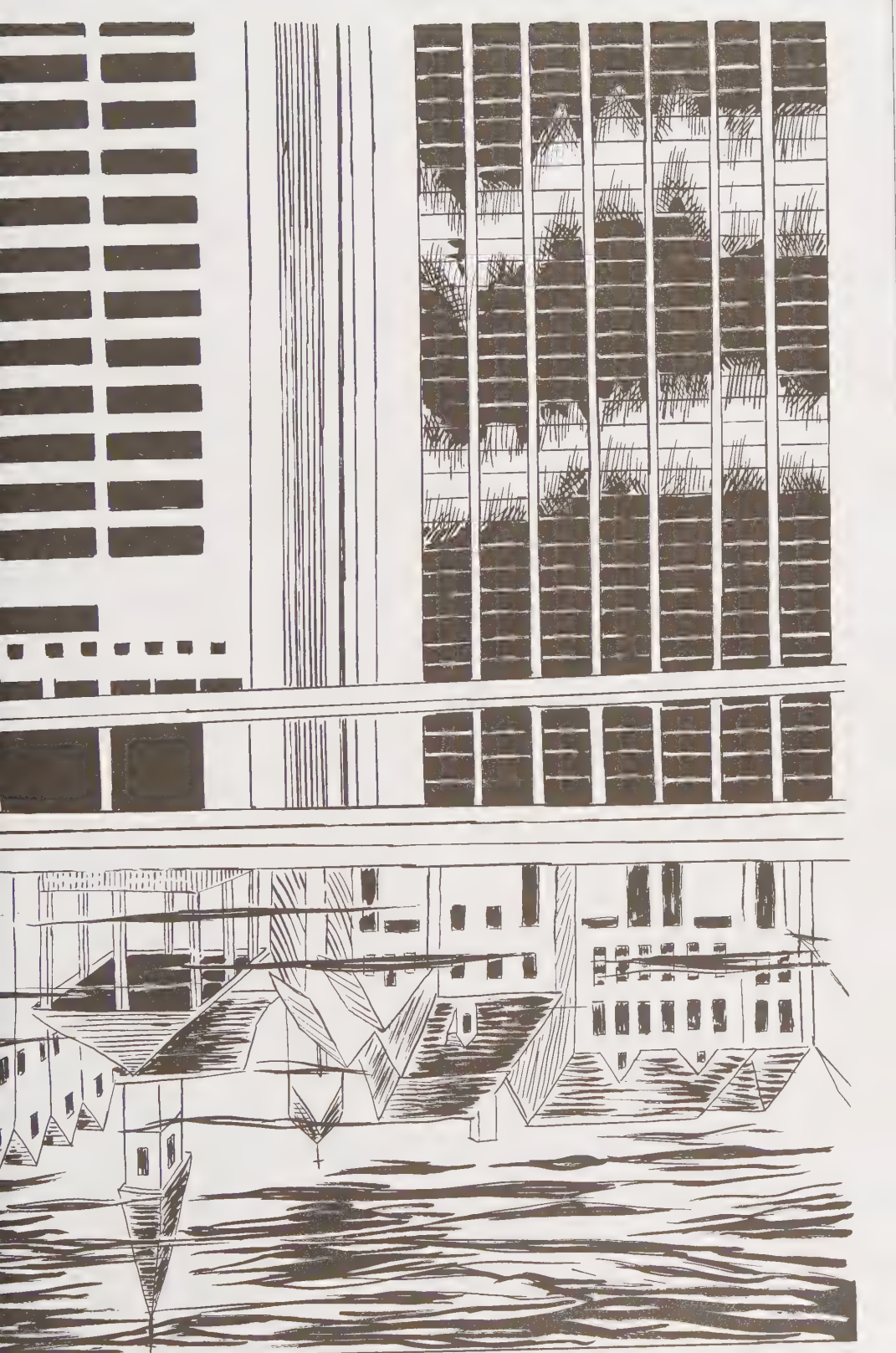
I can make some educated guesses about what happened.



It is the least I can do for these women. I can tell their story, using everything I know to be true about their lives, and add the parts we don't know but could be true.

What drove them to revolt?
It is time for a measured use
of historical imagination in
order to reconstruct a story.





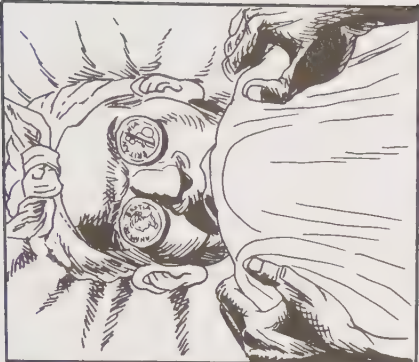
Chapter 3

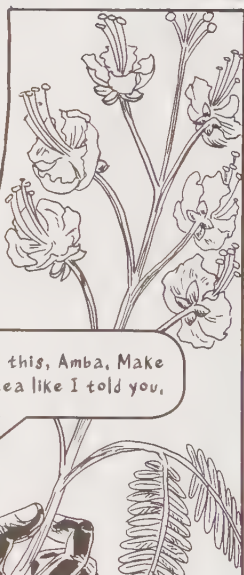
Some Hard Usage

NEW YORK, 1712









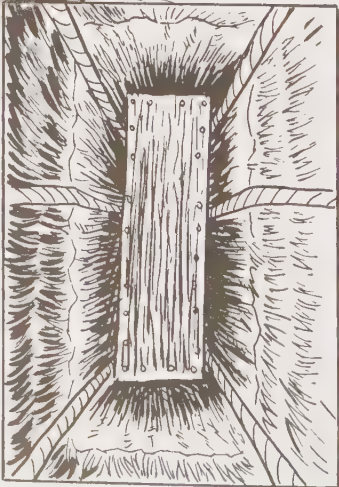
NEW YORK CITY AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND,
EKUA'S BURIAL.

Y. H. B. B. B. B.



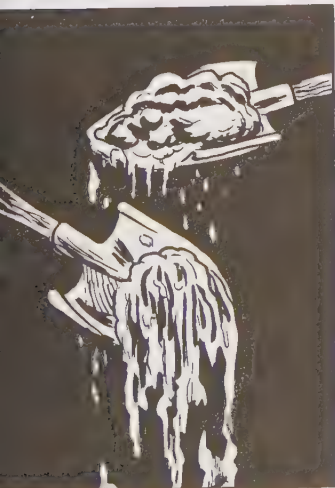
I remember Ekva. When everyone thought I was dying, Ekva came to me and helped me push my son out. She stayed with me and used her strength to keep me from crossing over.

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



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

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





It is time to go. Let us go before the watch comes and beats us bloody for being out this late.

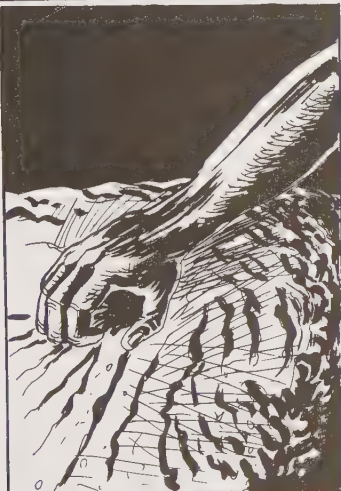


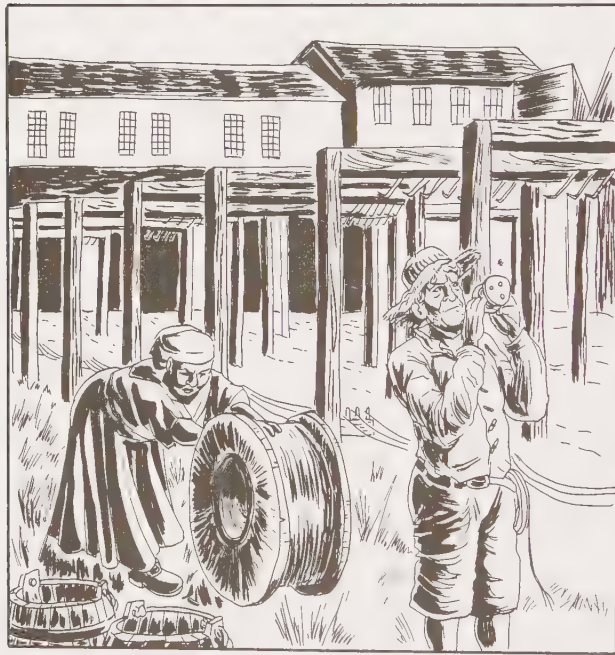
They worked her to death.

And we will be next if we don't fight back.

Let's meet at the well tomorrow.





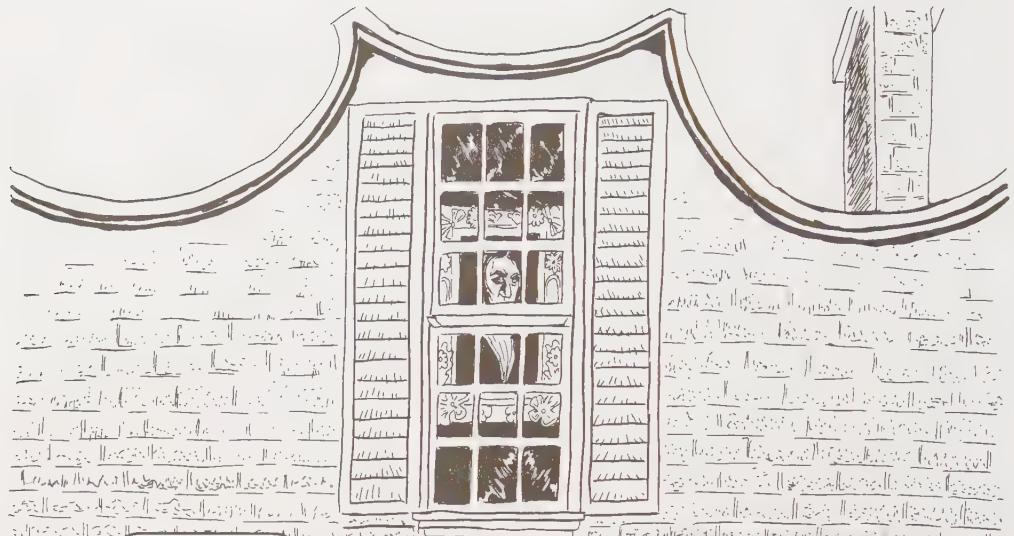


The home of
Adolph Philipse...

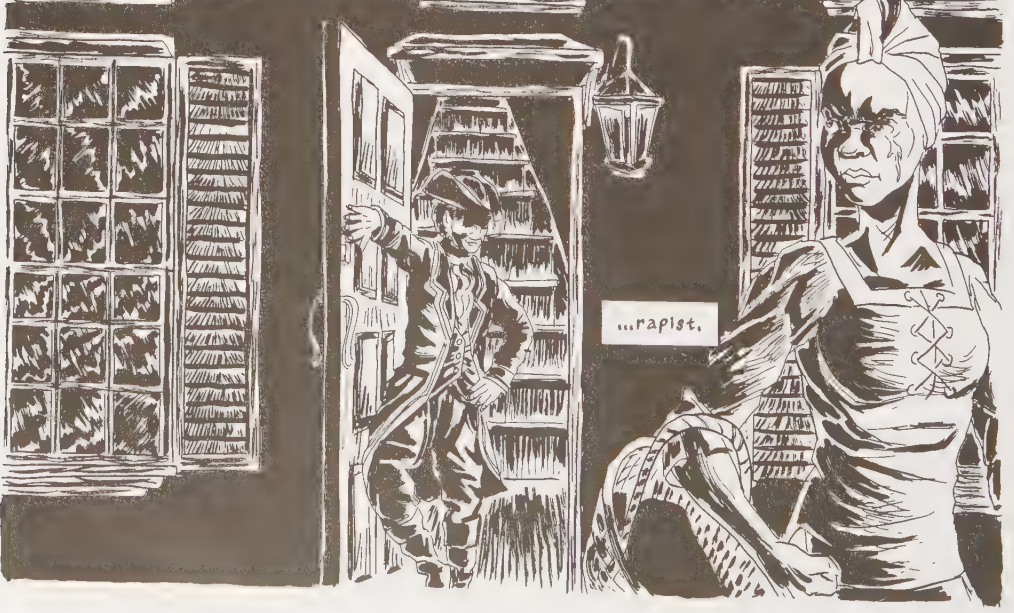
Assembly member...

slave trader...

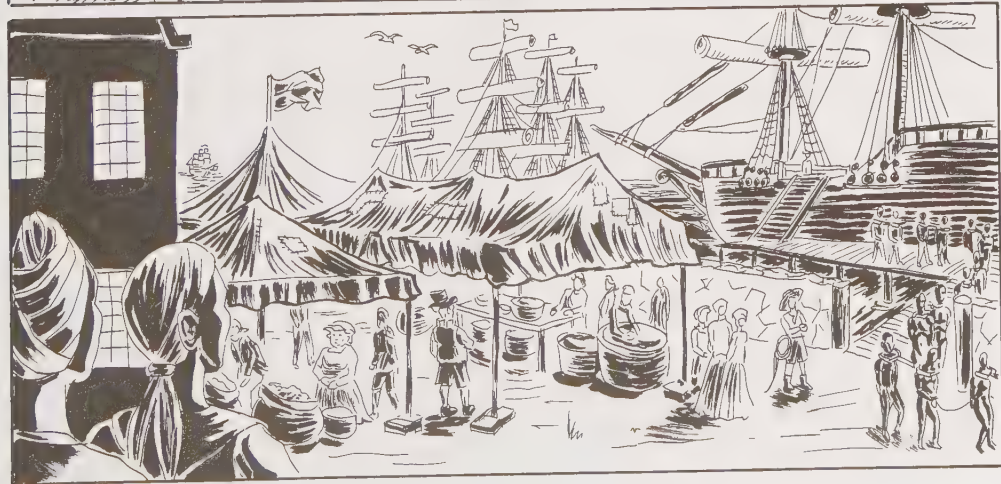




Hello, my dear!



...rapist.



The well.

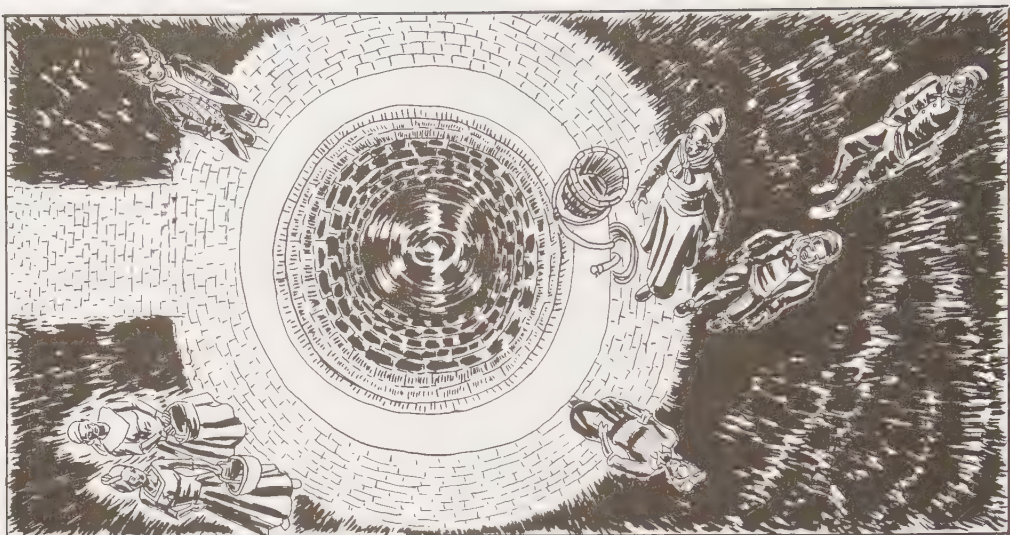


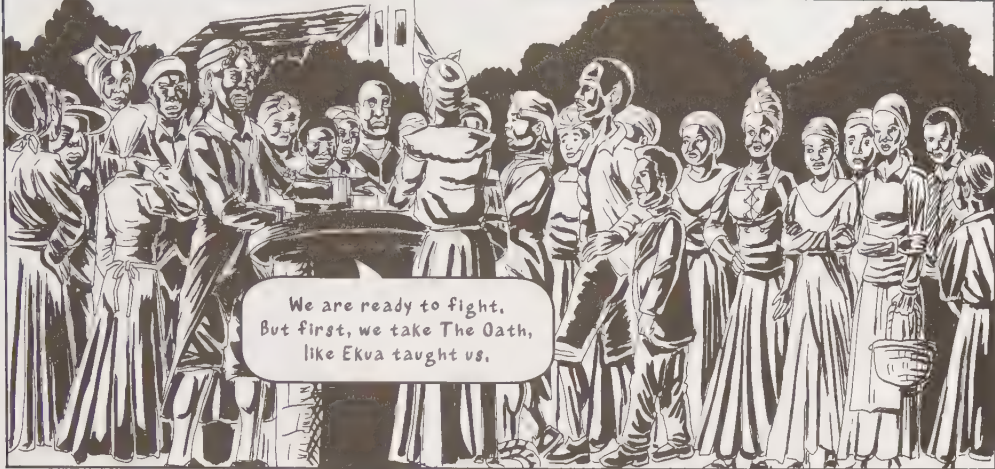
The well.





The well.





We are ready to fight.
But first, we take The Oath,
like Ekva taught us.



Ekva taught us if we
take The Oath and we
die in this fight, our
souls join the ancestors,

Yes!

where we continue
the fight against
this wicked place.

We join our
strength to Ekva's.



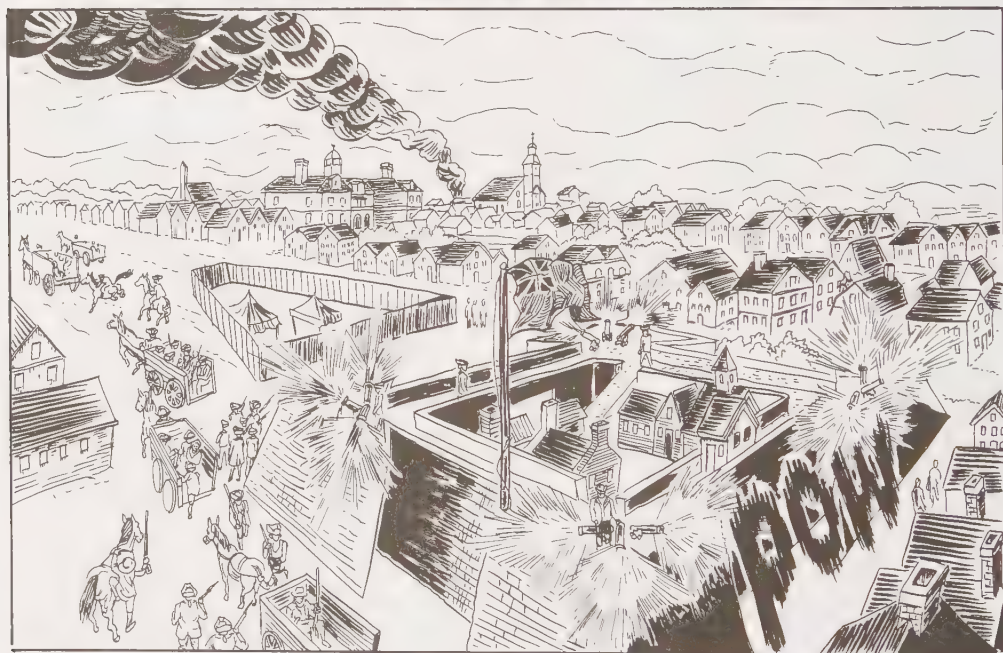
I better die in this fight. If I get
captured, that man will never let me go.

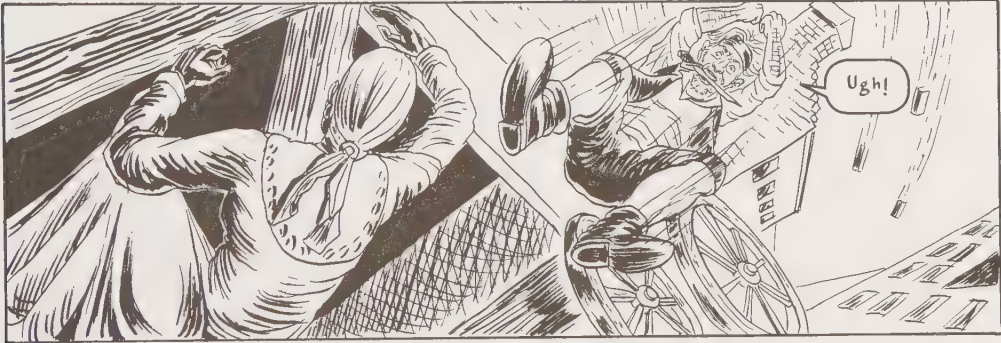


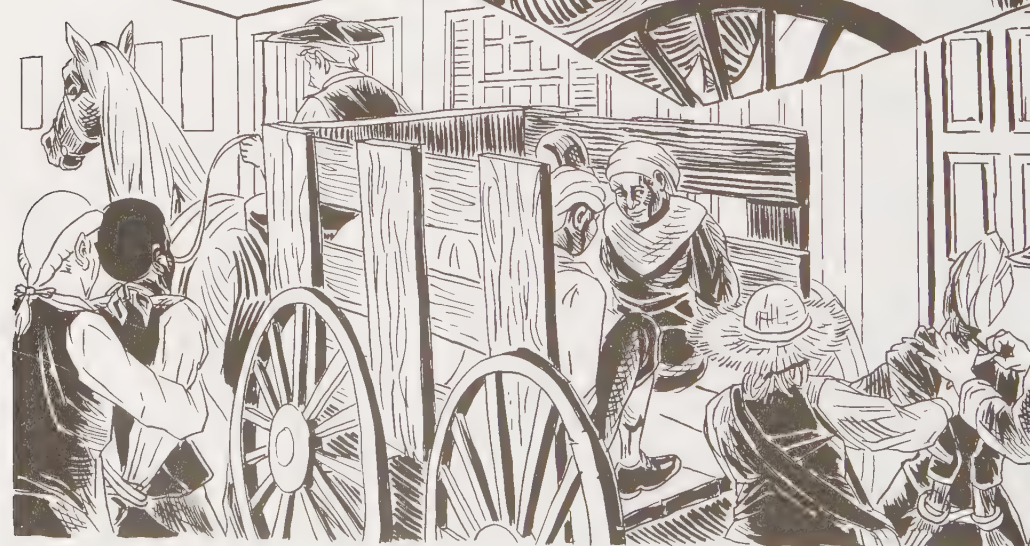
















New York governor's letter to Dom Regina

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 . . .



Amba, time to come home.

Chapter 4

Sarah or Abigail

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

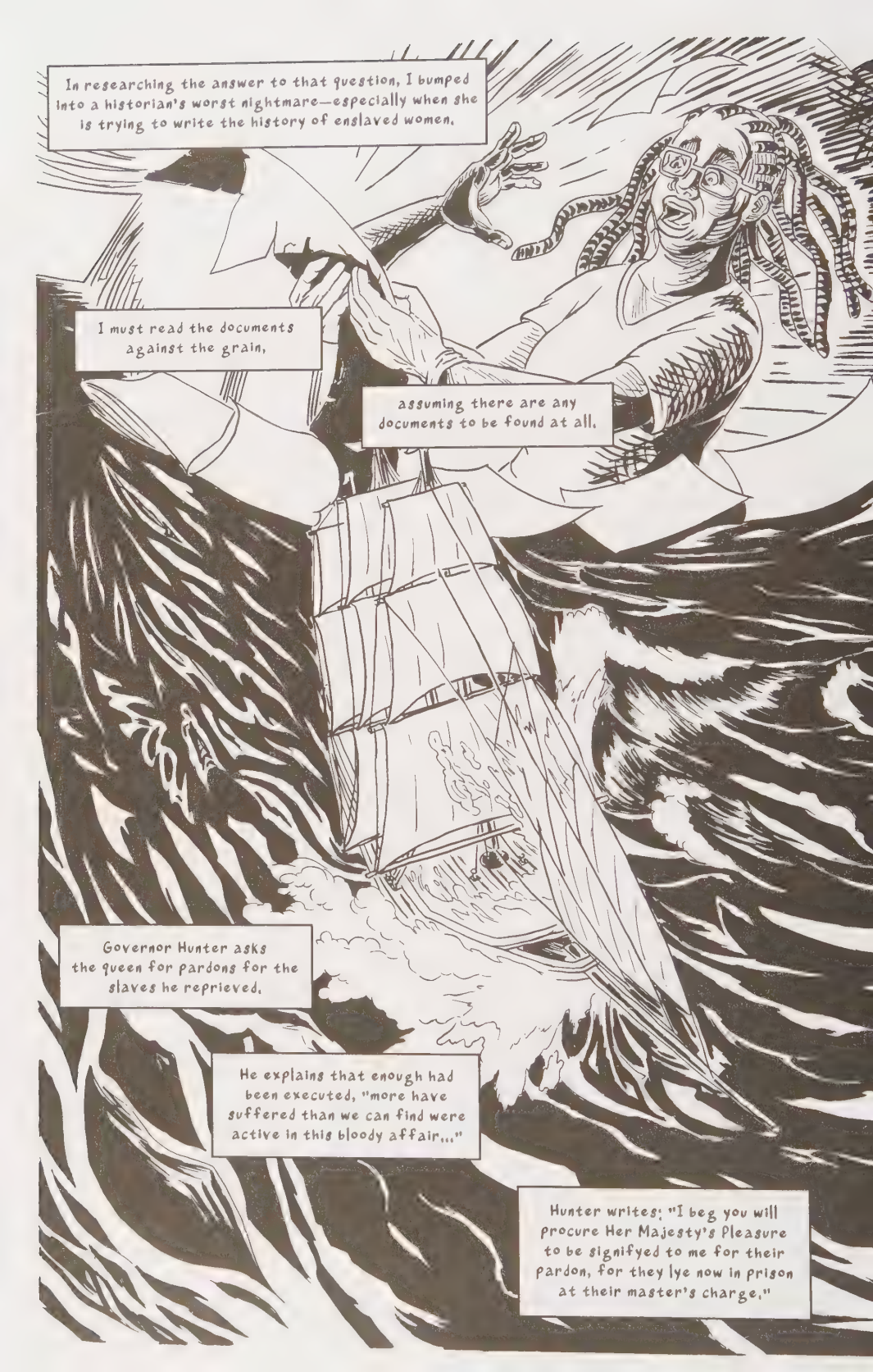
NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 2000

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

But which one was pregnant?

Sarah or Abigail?





In researching the answer to that question, I bumped 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 relieved.

He 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 lye 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 Dom Regina'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.

On March 14, 1713, almost a year after the trials, Hunter writes the Lords of Trade, reminding them of the slaves awaiting 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 indeed privy to the conspiracy but pleading her belly, was reprieved, she is since delivered, but in woeful condition ever since, and I think has suffer'd 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,"

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 1720. There is no mention of a pardon,

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



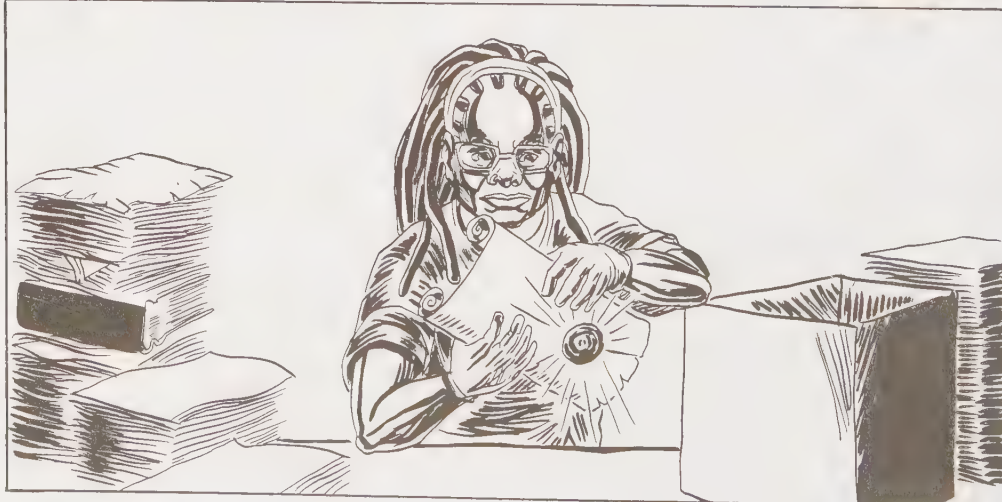
During that time, no one was meant to stay in jail for more than a few days. The punishment was inflicted on the body itself—branding, amputation, execution—not by serving a prison sentence. These jails, or "gaols," were miserable places; exposed, cold, hard surfaces filled with excrement and vermin.

Ultimately, the fate of Sarah or Abigail gets lost in political upheaval. Hunter doesn't hear from the secretary until June 22, 1715, over three years after he first petitioned the queen.

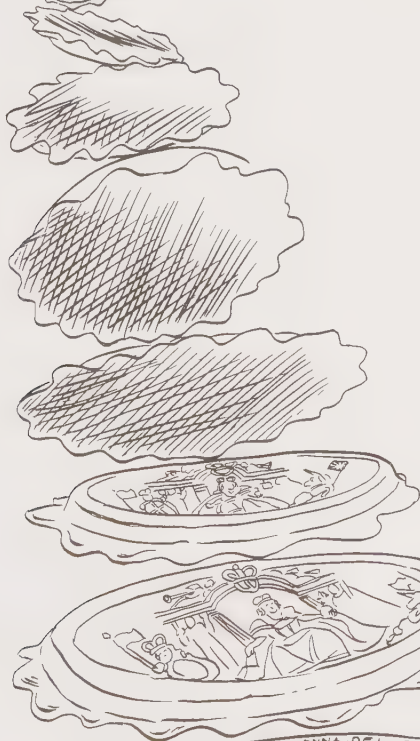
Queen Anne has died and been succeeded by the incompetent King George. "His principal amusement, apart from conversing with his mistresses, had been cutting paper into pretty patterns."

Could Hunter have just let her go?

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



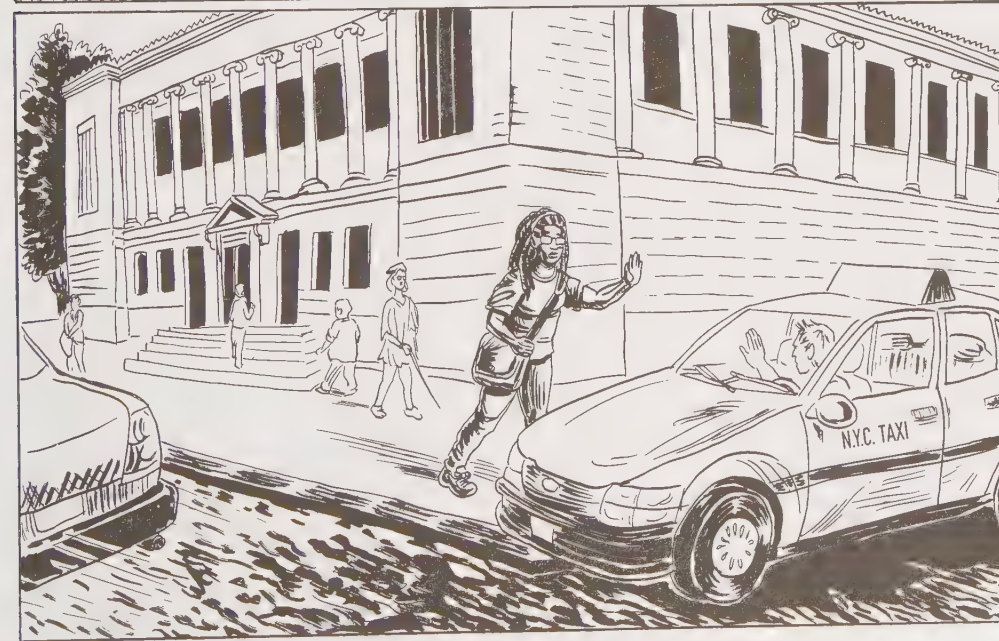
Aah! More Dom Regina!

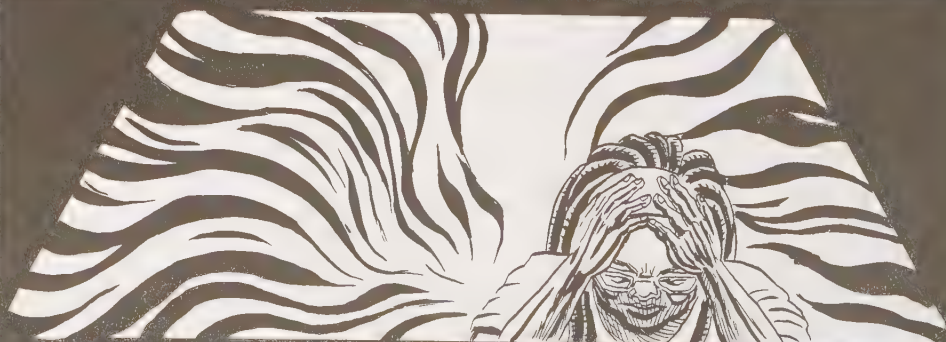
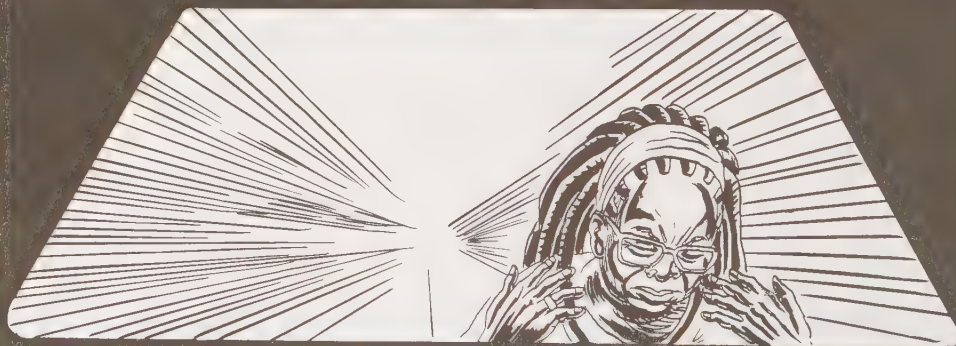




I can't find her. I'll never know what happened to Sarah or Abigail.









Chapter 5

The Search for the Negro Fiend

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA, 2000

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

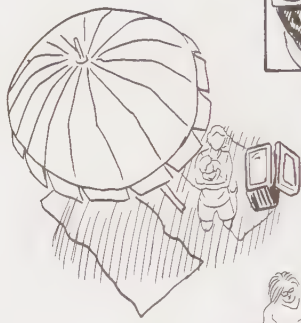
As Audre Lorde said:
"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

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



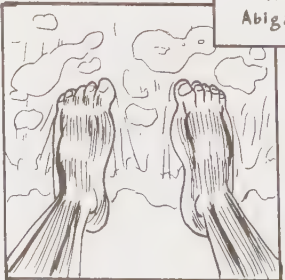


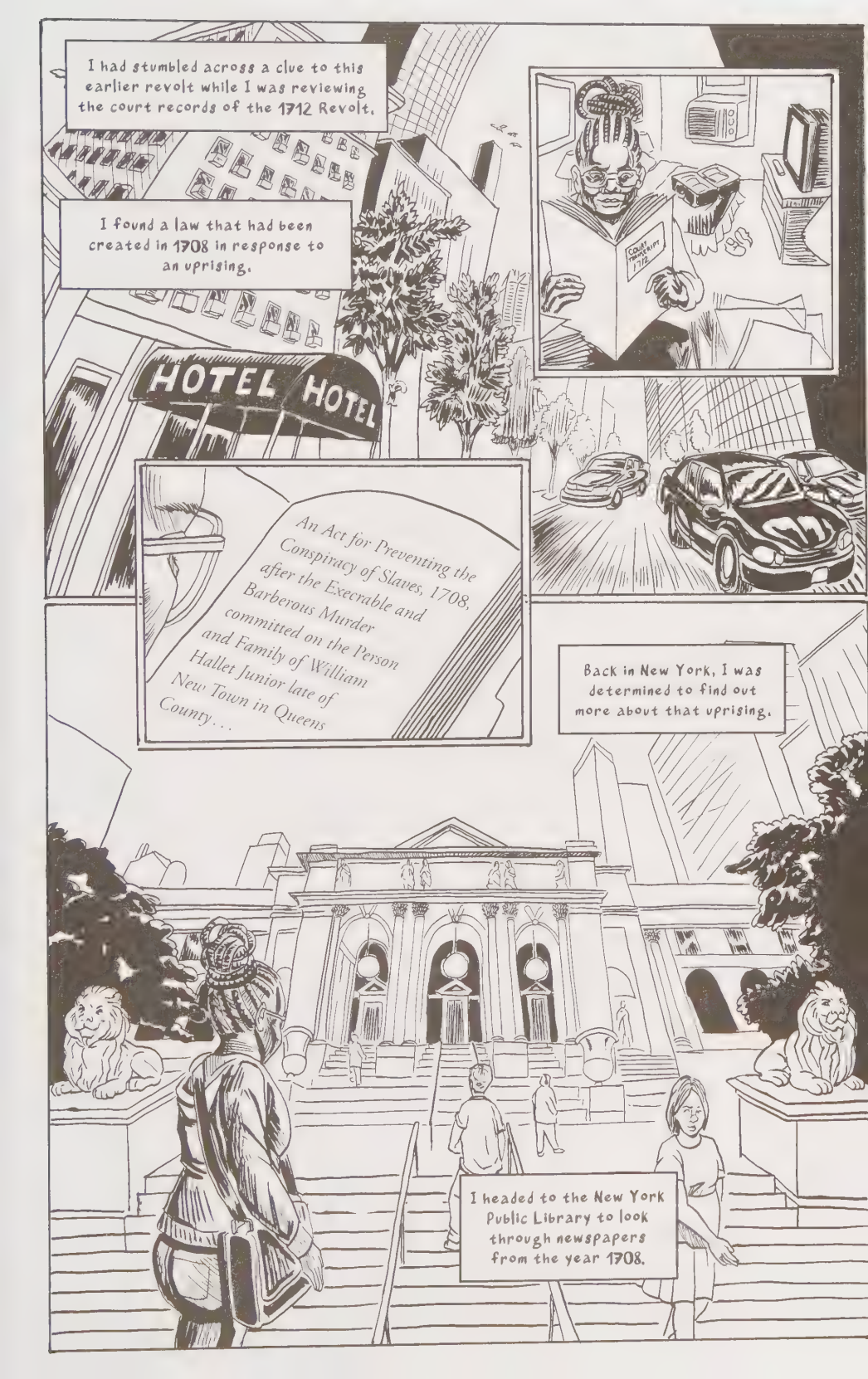
I'm hoping there is some natural limit. Like he will stop eating it before it makes him sick.



I head back to New York City to try to recover another revolt led by a woman,

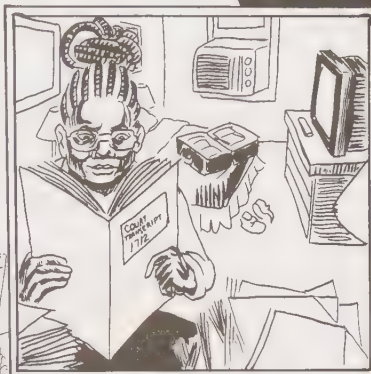
this time one that took place in 1708, four years earlier than the revolt involving Abigail, Sarah, Amba, and Lily.





I had stumbled across a clue to this earlier revolt while I was reviewing the court records of the 1712 Revolt.

I found a law that had been created in 1708 in response to an uprising.



An Act for Preventing the Conspiracy of Slaves, 1708, after the Execrable and Barbarous Murder committed on the Person and Family of William Hallet Junior late of New Town in Queens County...

Back in New York, I was determined to find out more about that uprising.

I headed to the New York Public Library to look through newspapers from the year 1708.



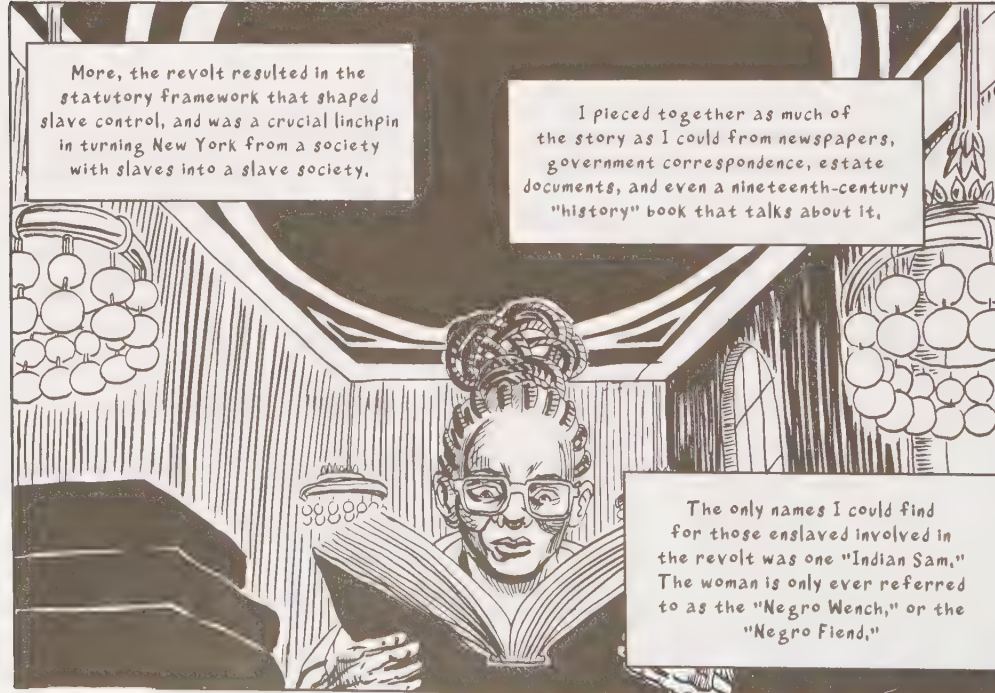
In the British colonies that would become the United States, there was only one newspaper in existence — the weekly *Boston News-Letter*.

February 9–16.
January 26, 1777/8. On Saturday night William Hickey Jr. fled his wife and three free children were executed by an Indian man and a negro woman. Their own slaves and were apprehended and confessed to that fact.



From that bit of information, I did a deep dive into the archive so I could tell the story of that woman and that revolt.

This story has been almost completely silenced in the history of slave revolts, though seven white people were killed and four slaves were executed.



More, the revolt resulted in the statutory framework that shaped slave control, and was a crucial linchpin in turning New York from a society with slaves into a slave society.

I pieced together as much of the story as I could from newspapers, government correspondence, estate documents, and even a nineteenth-century "history" book that talks about it.

The only names I could find for those enslaved involved in the revolt was one "Indian Sam." The woman is only ever referred to as the "Negro Wench," or the "Negro Fiend."



JANUARY 24, 1708, NEWTOWN (NOW ELMHURST, QUEENS)

*Documents Relative to the
Colonial History of the City of New York, Volume 5.*

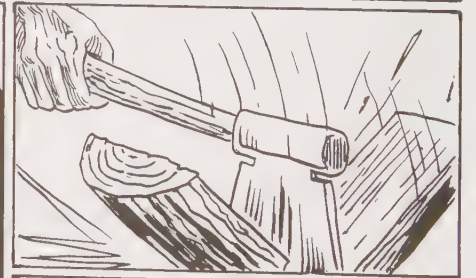
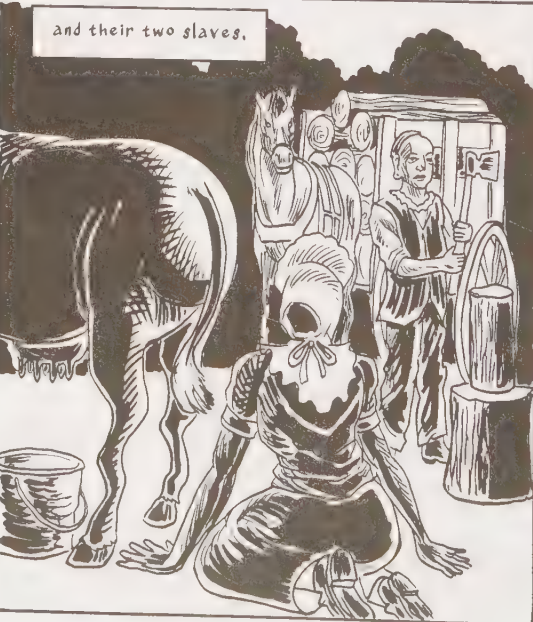
To the Right Hon. The Lords Commissioner of Trades and Plantations . . .

I have nothing new to acquaint you with, only that a most barbarous murder has been committed upon the Family of One Hallet by an Indian Man Slave, and a Negro Woman, who have murder'd their Master, Mistress and five Children; The slaves were taken, and I immediately issued a special commission for the Tryal of them, which was done, and the man sentenced to be hanged, and the Woman burnt, and they have been executed;

They Discovered two other Negros their accomplices who have been tried, condemned & Executed.

*I am, My Lords,
Your Lordships most faithful and hum.*

Seru. Cornbury



Sam and the Negro Fiend are done being enslaved.



Done with all of it.



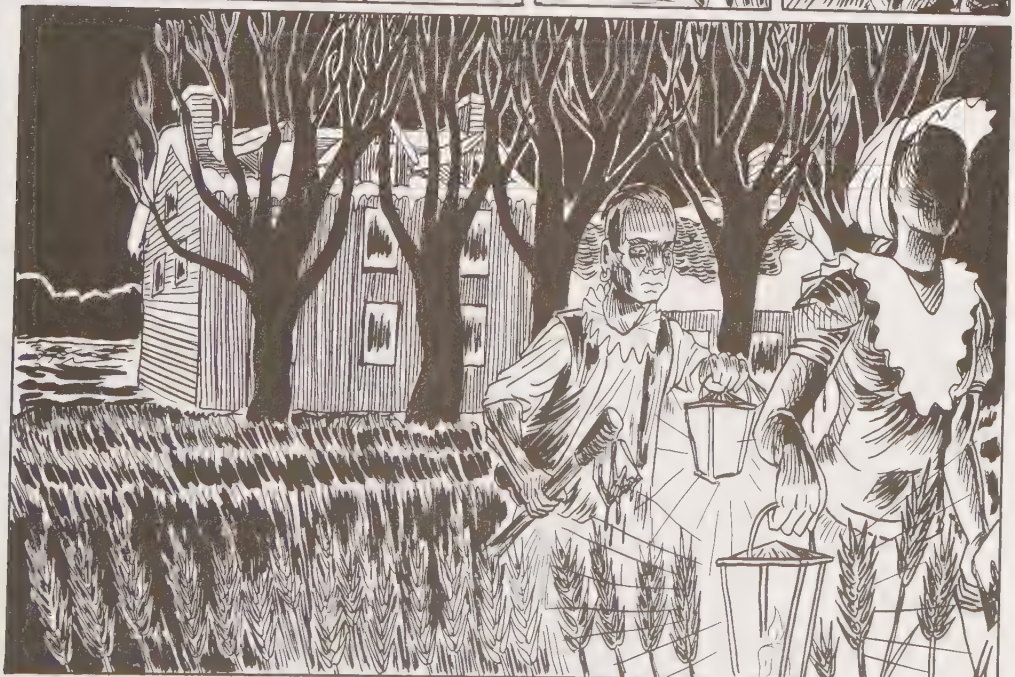
They, along with other enslaved people in farmhouses nearby,



have decided to kill the slavers tonight.







Sam and the Negro Fiend were captured and taken into custody early the next morning...

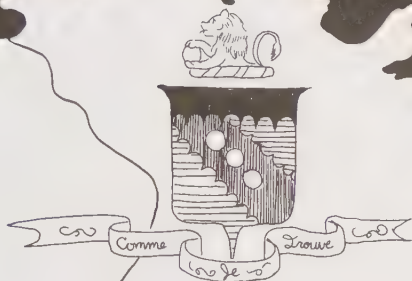


...along with several others, who were caught before they could kill any other slavers.





In jail, they awaited trial. The men were hanged, and the Negro Fiend was burned at the stake.



Newtown

Flushing

And why was that? Why was she the only one burned at the stake?



Jamaica ★

The court in 1708 actually had no other choice.





English Legal System

1. Common Law
2. Statutory Law

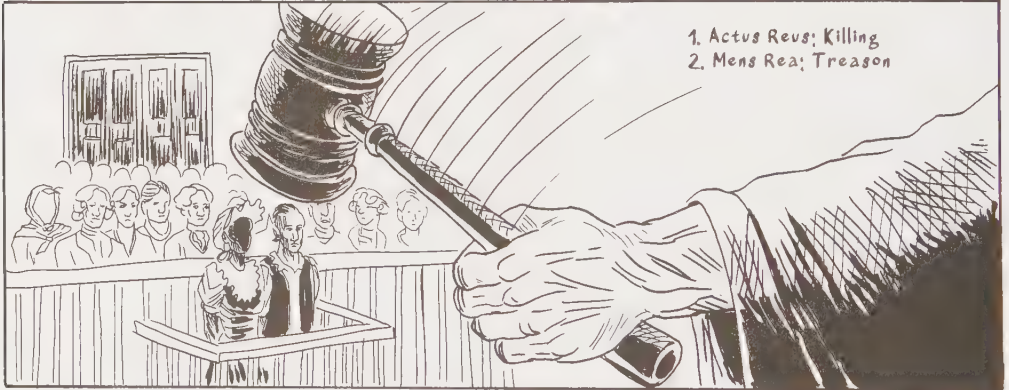
New York was a colony of England, and as such, English law prevailed. And in the English legal system (and in the United States today, inherited from its colonial days), there are two kinds of law: "common law," which is created by judges in specific cases and then later applied to the same or similar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



1. Actus Reus (criminal act)
2. Mens Rea (guilty mind)



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.



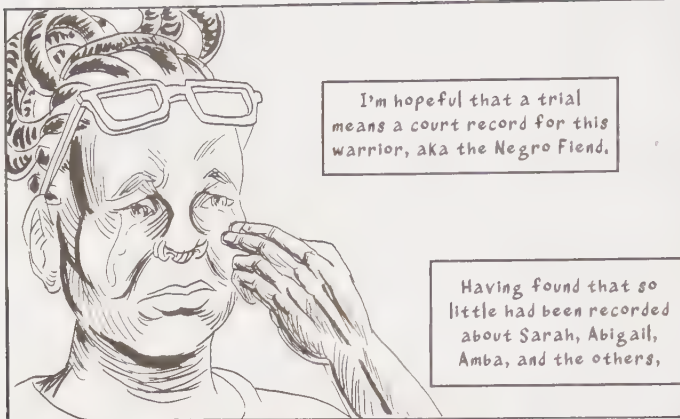
1. Actus Reus: Killing
2. Mens Rea: Treason



Way back in 1352, 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.

1. The very essence of Patriarchy
2. In case you were wondering



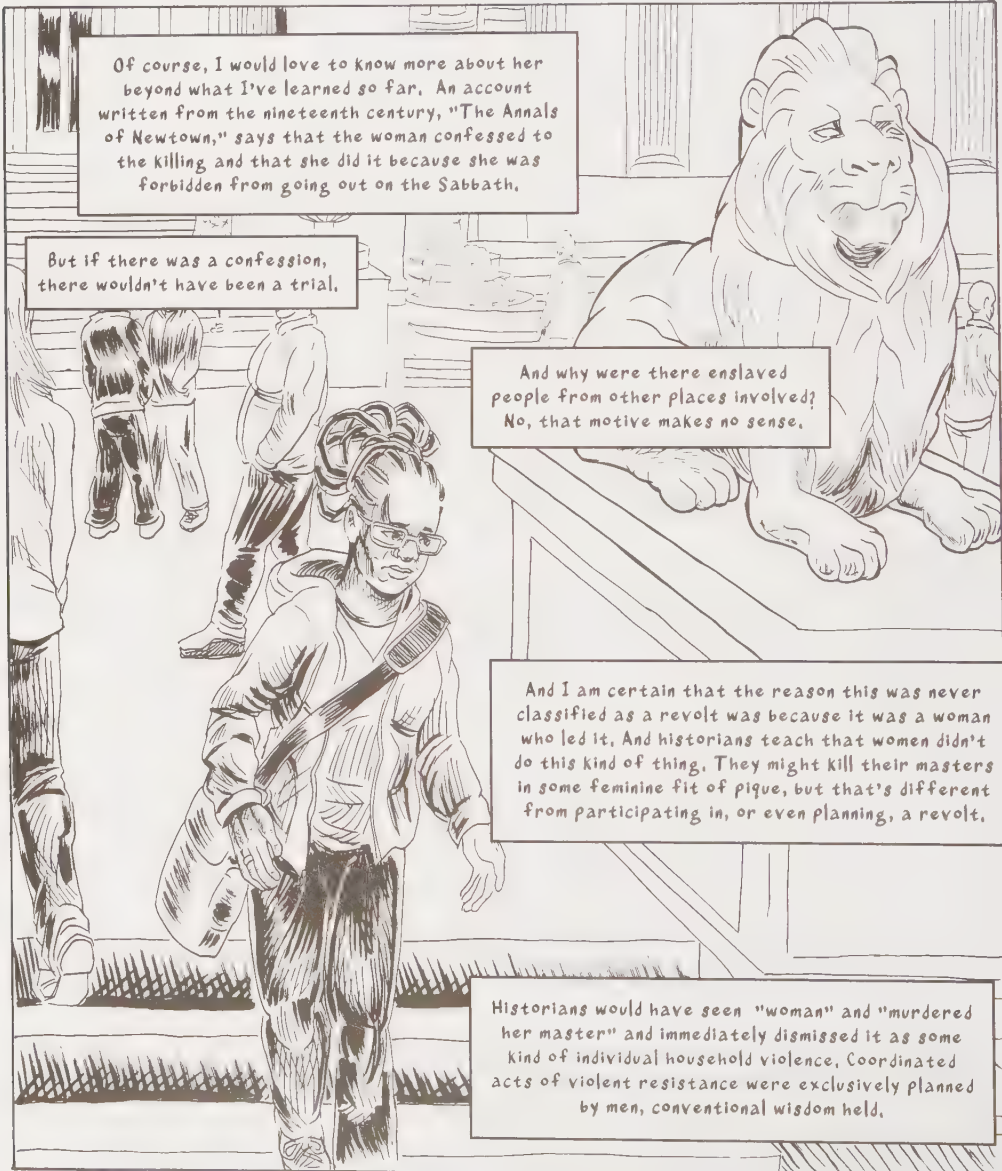


I'm hopeful that a trial means a court record for this warrior, aka the Negro Fiend.

Having found that so little had been recorded about Sarah, Abigail, Amba, and the others,



I wasn't hopeful that I would find the Negro Fiend's story.



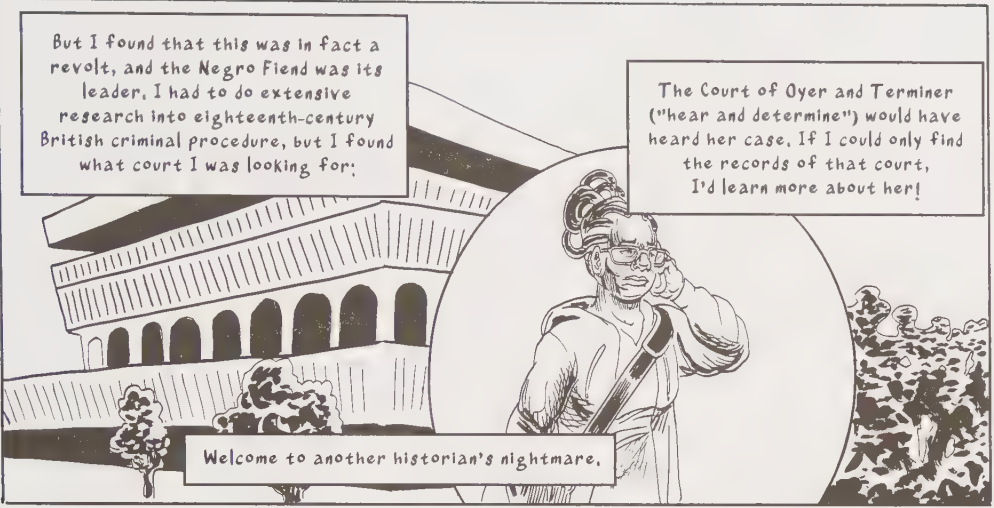
Of course, I would love to know more about her beyond what I've learned so far. An account written from the nineteenth century, "The Annals of Newtown," says that the woman confessed to the killing and that she did it because she was forbidden from going out on the Sabbath.

But if there was a confession, there wouldn't have been a trial.

And why were there enslaved people from other places involved? No, that motive makes no sense.

And I am certain that the reason this was never classified as a revolt was because it was a woman who led it. And historians teach that women didn't do this kind of thing. They might kill their masters in some feminine fit of pique, but that's different from participating in, or even planning, a revolt.

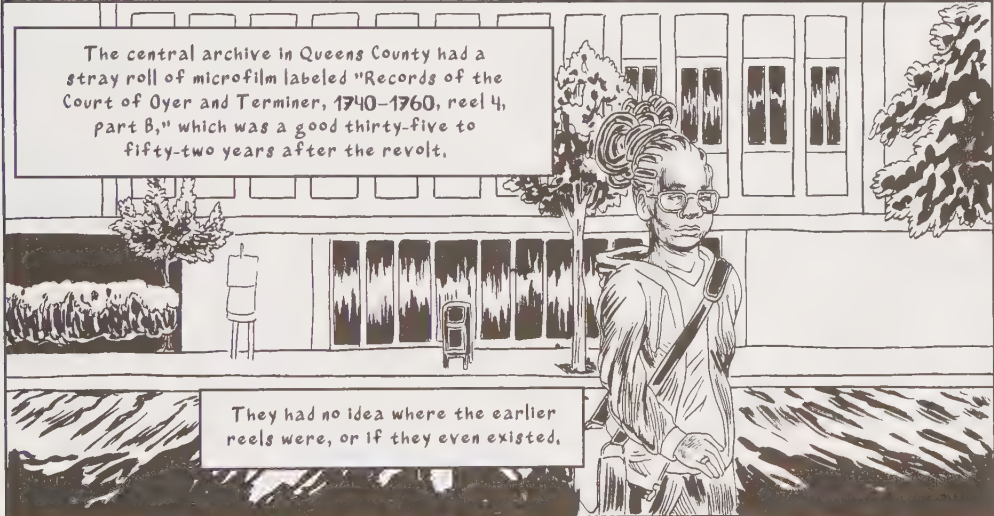
Historians would have seen "woman" and "murdered her master" and immediately dismissed it as some kind of individual household violence. Coordinated acts of violent resistance were exclusively planned by men, conventional wisdom held.



But I found that this was in fact a revolt, and the Negro Fiend was its leader, I had to do extensive research into eighteenth-century British criminal procedure, but I found what court I was looking for:

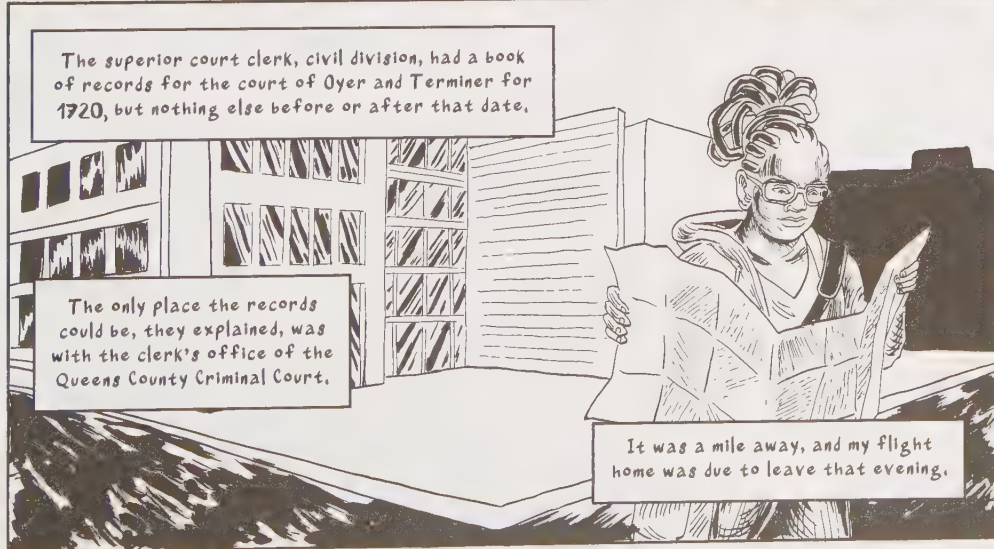
The Court of Oyer and Terminer ("hear and determine") would have heard her case. If I could only find the records of that court, I'd learn more about her!

Welcome to another historian's nightmare.



The central archive in Queens County had a stray roll of microfilm labeled "Records of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, 1740-1760, reel 4, part B," which was a good thirty-five to fifty-two years after the revolt.

They had no idea where the earlier reels were, or if they even existed.



The superior court clerk, civil division, had a book of records for the court of Oyer and Terminer for 1720, but nothing else before or after that date.

The only place the records could be, they explained, was with the clerk's office of the Queens County Criminal Court.

It was a mile away, and my flight home was due to leave that evening.

I ran all the way there.



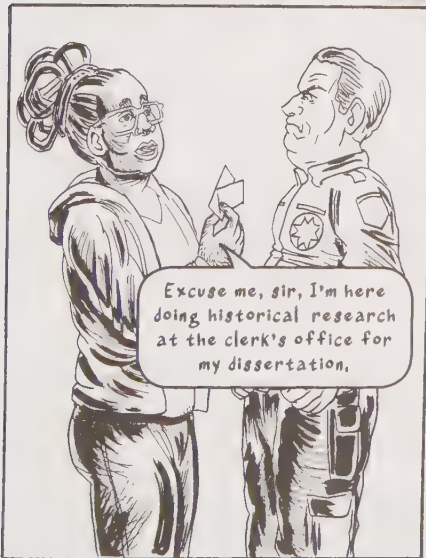
And crashed directly against current configurations of race, gender, power, and access.

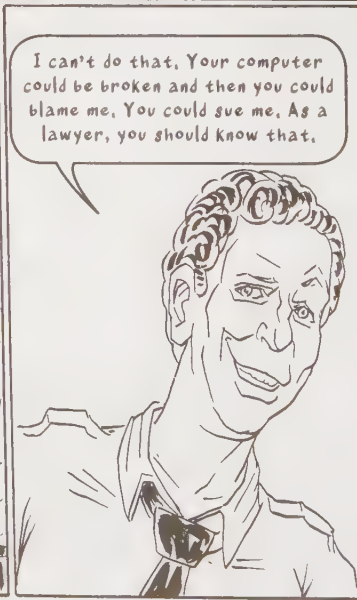
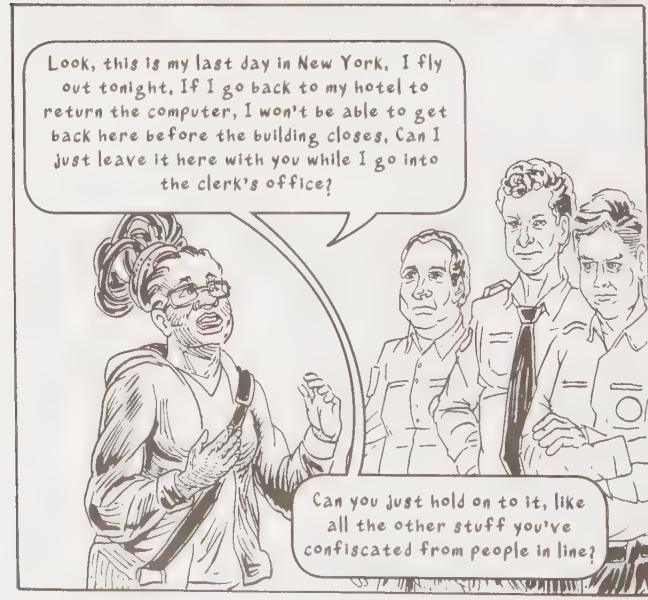
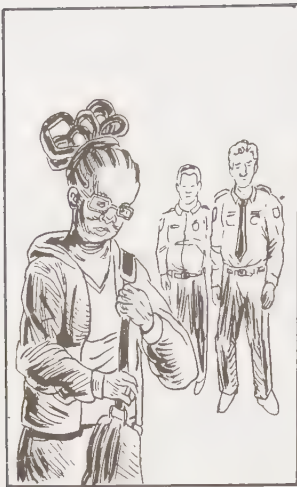


This wasn't just an archive, it was the current criminal court for Queens County, and I arrived on a regular court day.

The records I needed were held by the regular criminal court clerk. But I had to get through the security line to get to them.



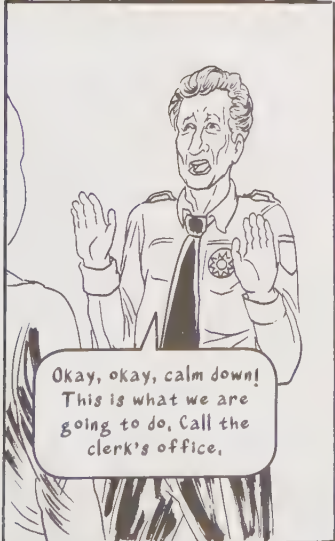






Are you kidding me? I could practice law across the street at the federal court, I could argue a case before the Supreme Court of the United States,

and you have the audacity to keep me out of the Queens County criminal court building because I have a computer???

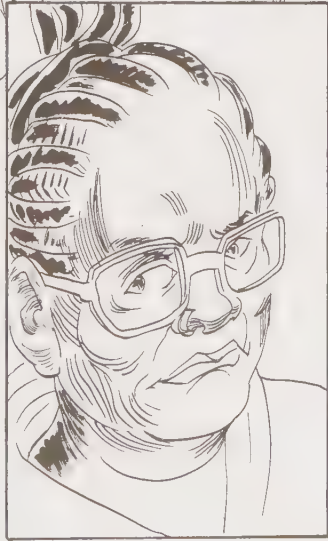


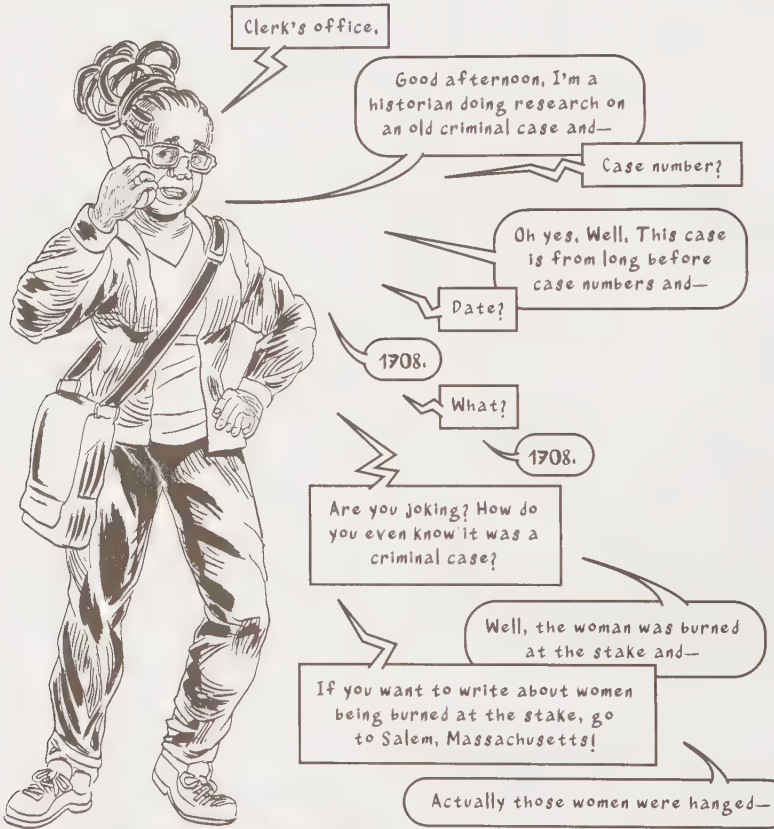
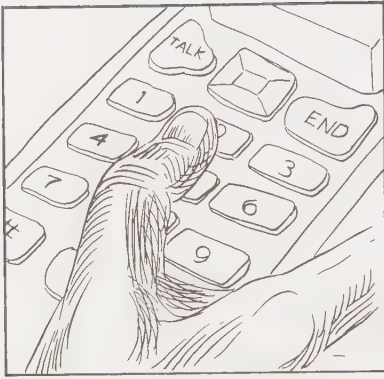
Okay, okay, calm down! This is what we are going to do. Call the clerk's office.

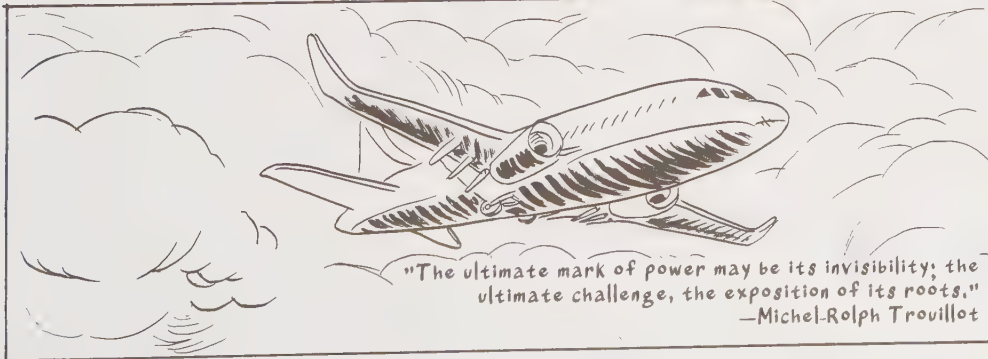
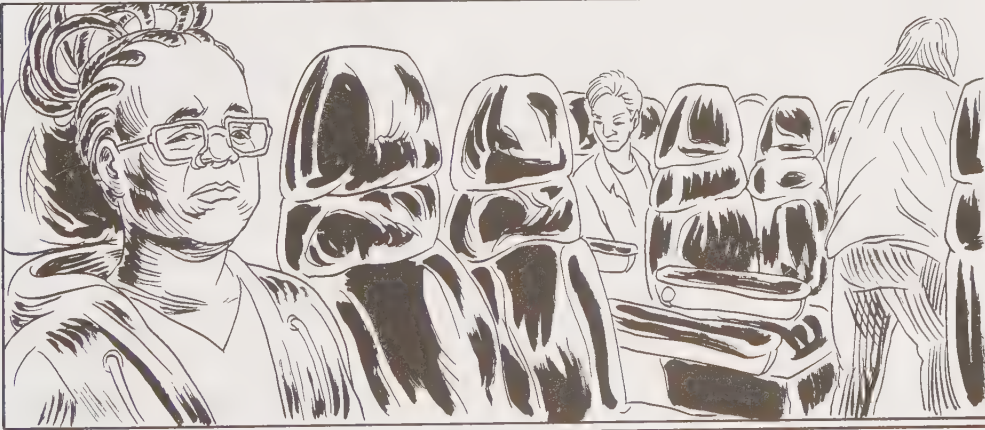
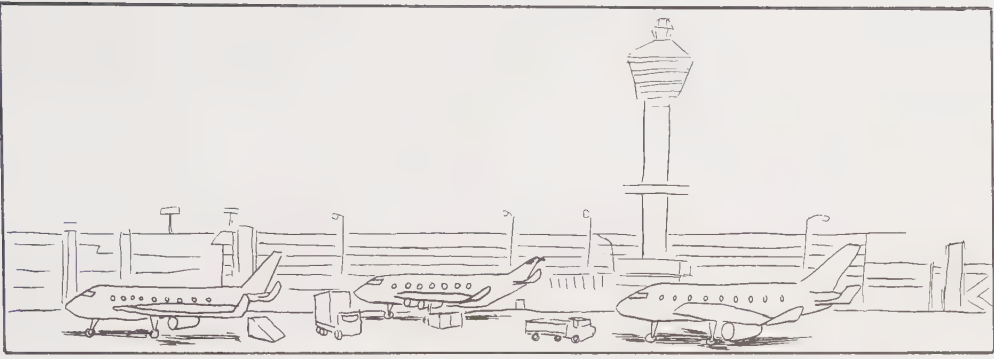


If you can get someone from there to come out and walk you in, over there,

I will let you in with that computer.







"The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots."
—Michel-Rolph Trouillot



Chapter 6

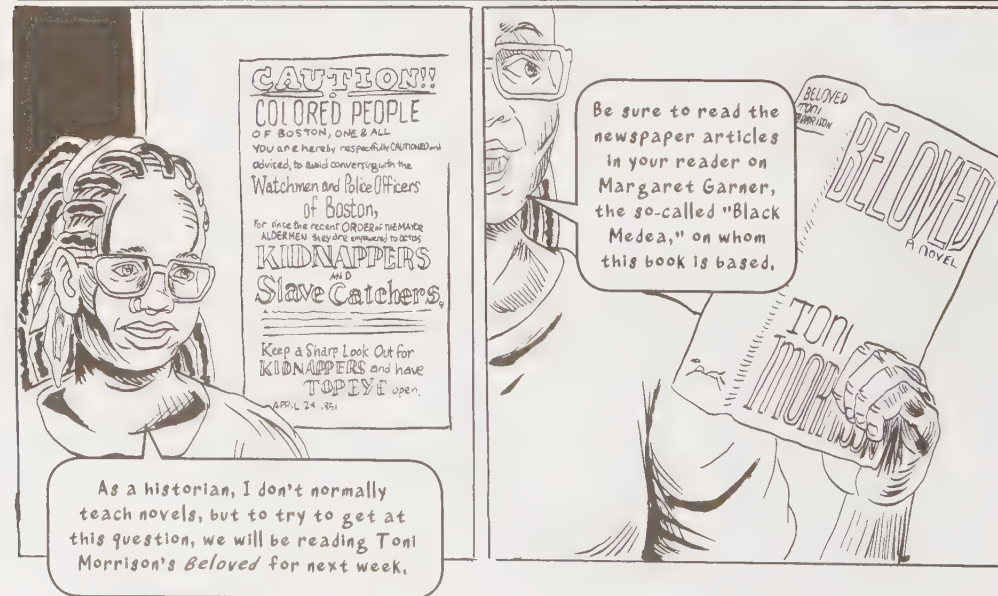
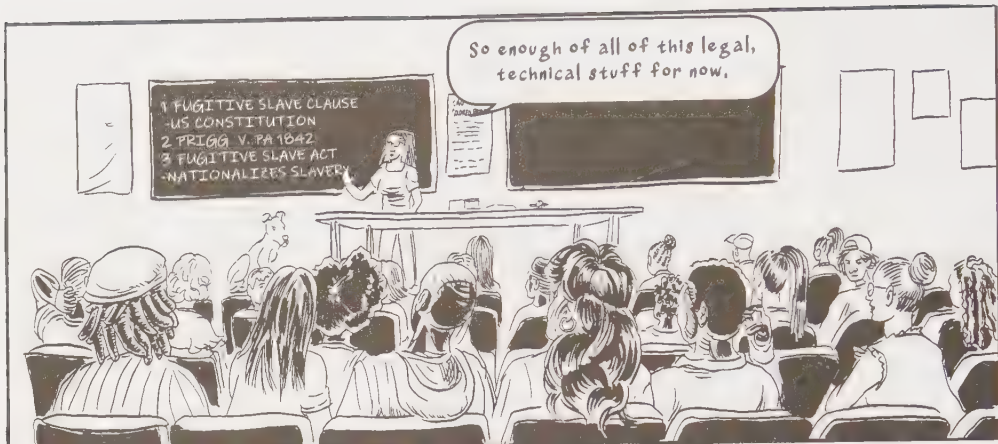
They Cut Off My Voice (So I Grew Two Voices)

SANTA CRUZ, 2001

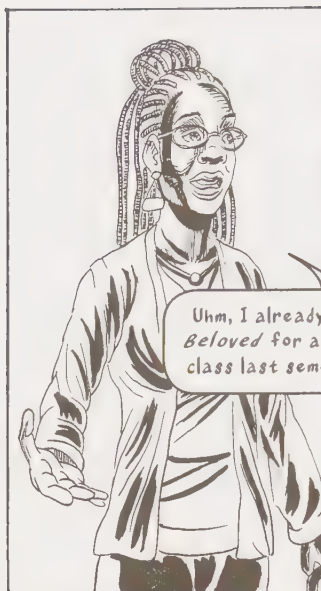
When I wasn't researching,
I was teaching.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

Handwritten notes and scribbles at the bottom of the page, including the date 11/11/01 and other illegible markings.







Uhm, I already read *Beloved* for another class last semester.



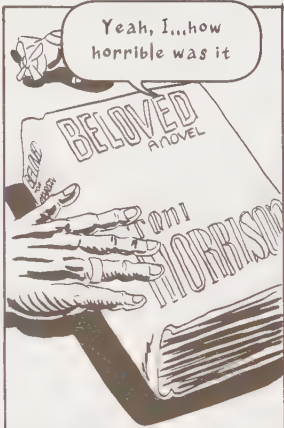
So I'm hoping it's okay if I don't read it again for next week.



That's fine, as long as you are able to discuss it.



Pretty upsetting, isn't it?



Yeah, I...how horrible was it



that you'd kill your own child rather than...

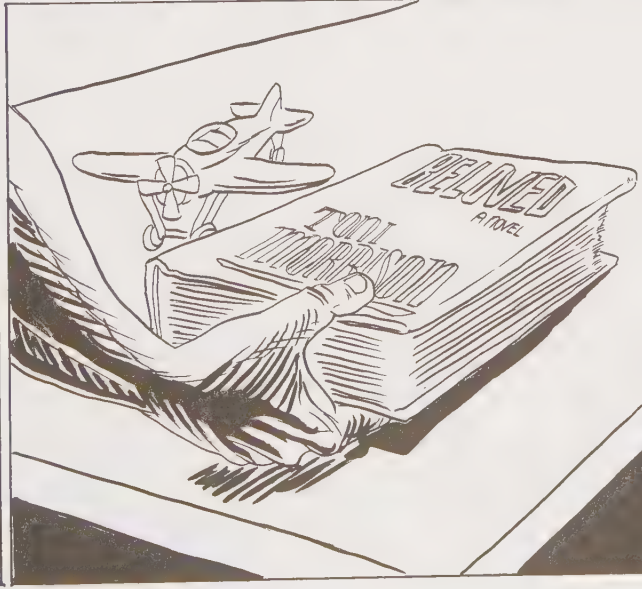
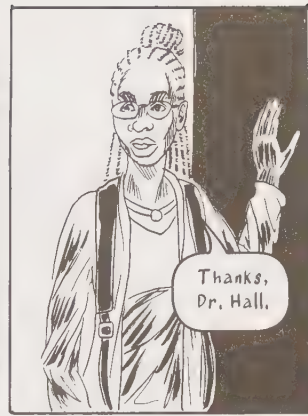


Yeah, I think about that a lot.

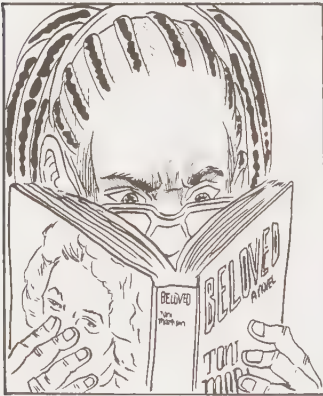


Whenever I teach this book...

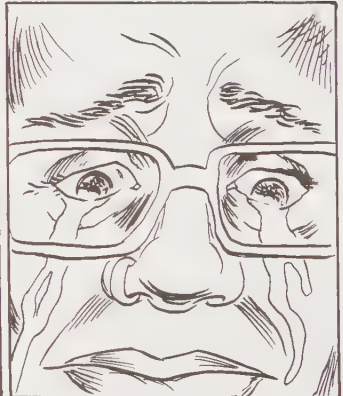




REBECCA'S HOUSE, SANTA CRUZ

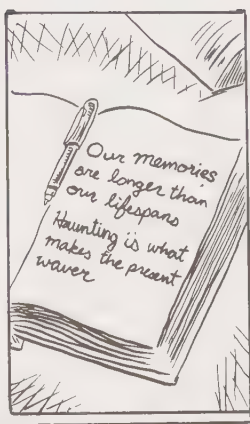
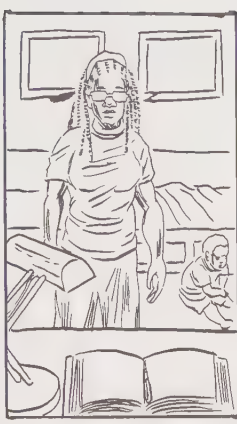


Never.



Just...never.

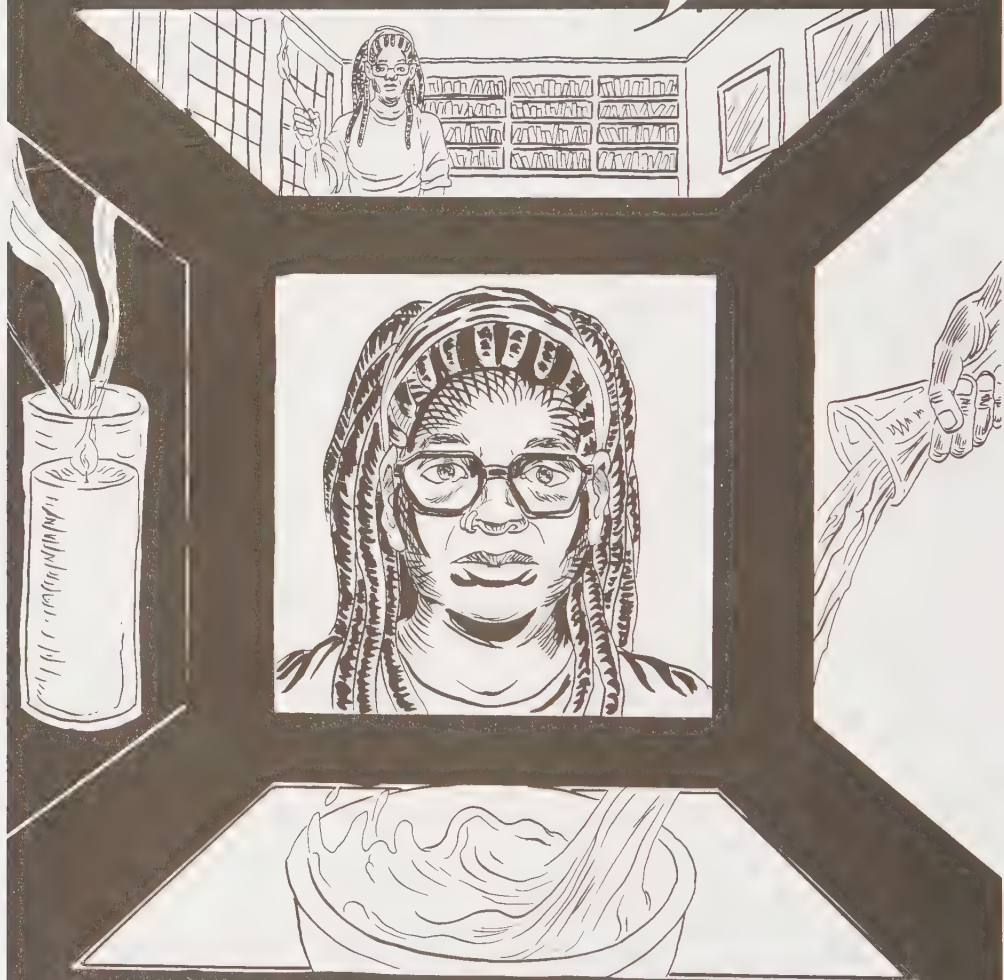




My students inspired my research,
and so did my family history.

Grandmother Harriet Thorpe,
I pour this libation for you and
request your guidance,

Born a slave, though you passed long
before I was born, my father loved you
deeply and always told stories about you.

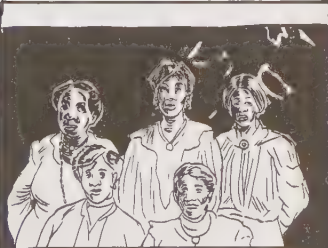
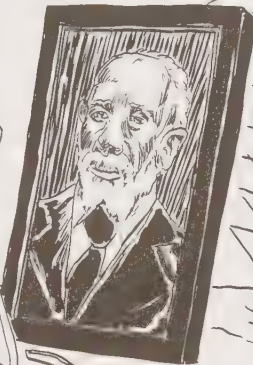
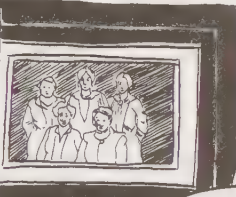


I learned of your struggles
and of your powerful spirit. How
nothing got you down for long.

I've done nothing like this before, I
have never even spoken to you before
now. But you've been in my thoughts
since I was a little child.



As I grew older and learned more about you and about life, I have felt your indomitable spirit and the spirit of all my ancestors, including those in slavery.



Now, I call on you to ask for your support and blessings.

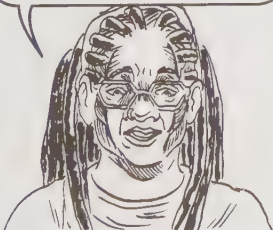
This work I'm doing is hard, and it hurts.



It hurts so bad.



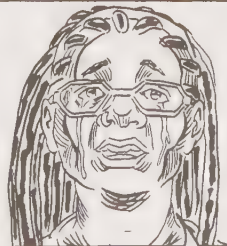
Yet, Grandmother, you survived, and even thrived, though you were born a slave.

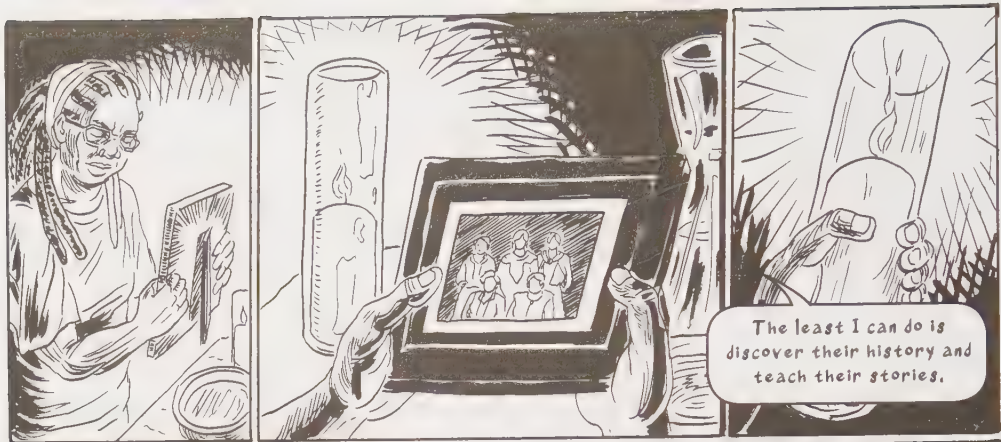


I don't know how our people could survive slavery, but we did.

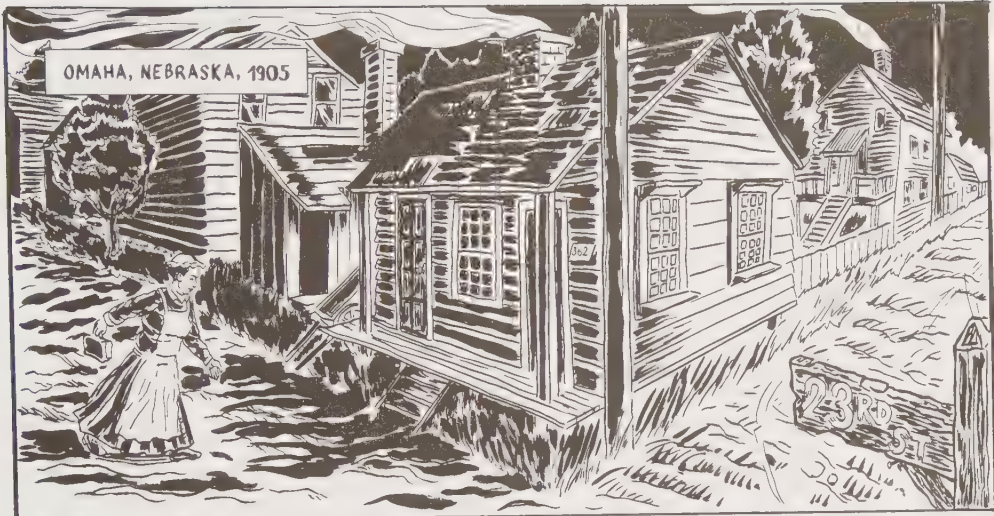


And now, I have to believe if they could survive that, we can survive today.

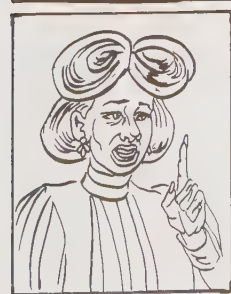




*Sweet Honey in the Rock, "Song of the Exiled," Live at Carnegie Hall, 1987.









You are learning to read so fast! Why didn't you learn when you were a kid?

Squire Sweeney didn't let any of us learn on his plantation, and after slavery, all my time was spent working and earning money.



Otto, I didn't have time for no school. But now you have your schooling and you are teaching me.



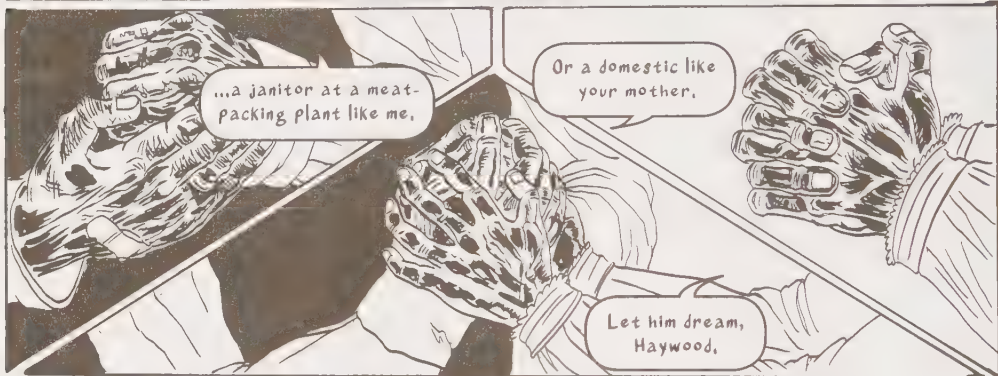
Thank you, Mom.







Don't DAD me! A postal clerk is a respectable, good-paying job. It's a far cry from being...



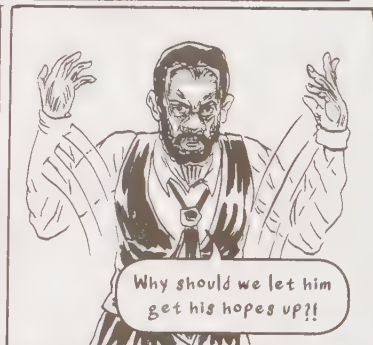
...a janitor at a meat-packing plant like me.

Or a domestic like your mother.

Let him dream, Haywood.



Let him fight to be who he wants to be!



Why should we let him get his hopes up?!



You will learn, You will learn how it really is.



Don't listen to him,
Otto.
He's just tired. He's—

You have had a
rough time, too!

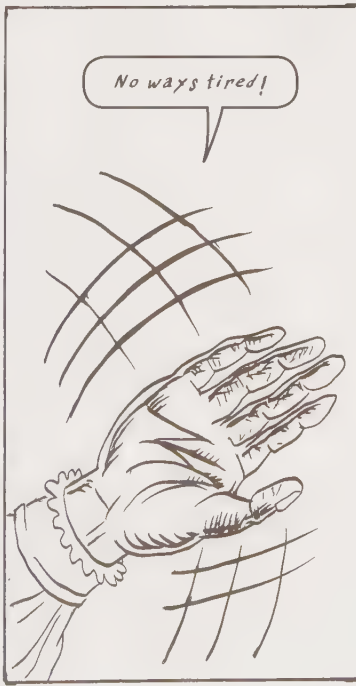
Maybe, but at least
I'm not tired!

You have two
jobs, Mom!



No ways tired!

Mom!



No ways tired!

1913. Nana Harriet has gone to Chicago for work, leaving the rest of the family behind in Nebraska.



Harriet, we have no choice! Those white folk said leave town...

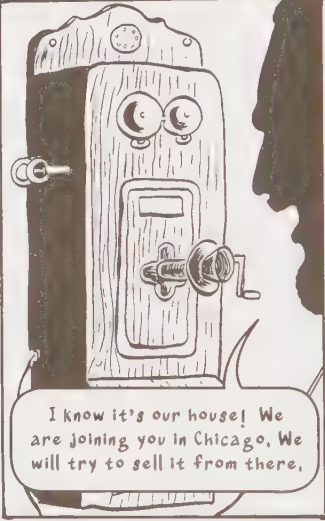


...or they will kill me!



That is our house. We worked hard and bought that house.

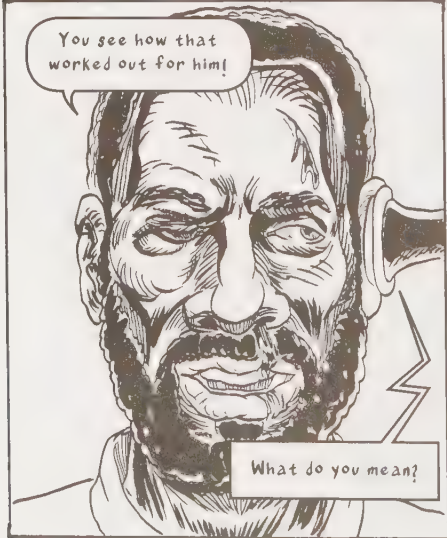
We can't just up and leave!



I know it's our house! We are joining you in Chicago. We will try to sell it from there.

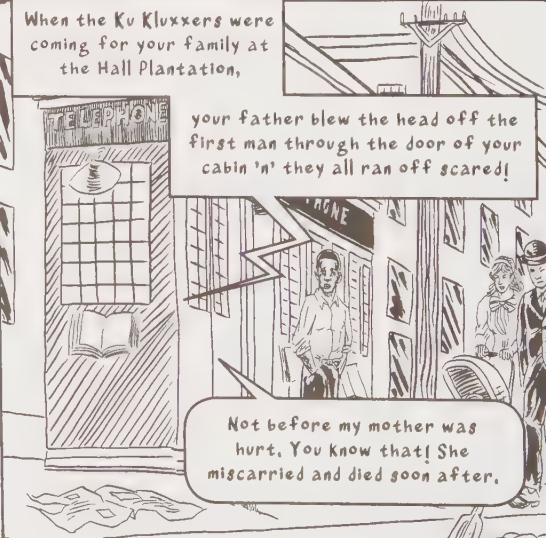


We can stay and fight! Remember what your father says. If you stand up, they will back down. They are truly little scared boys!



You see how that worked out for him!

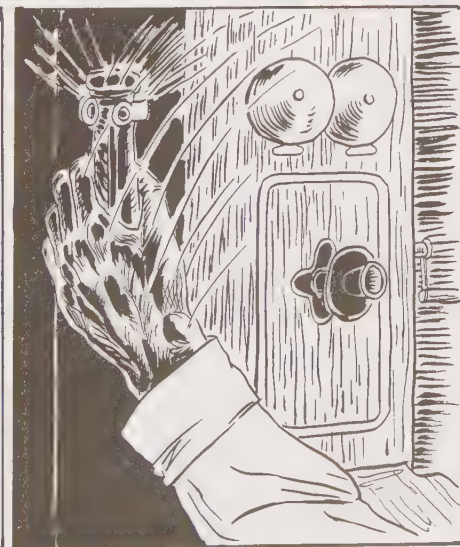
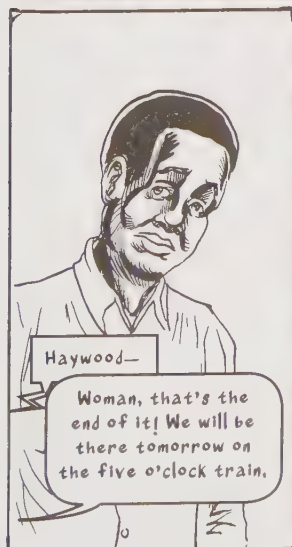
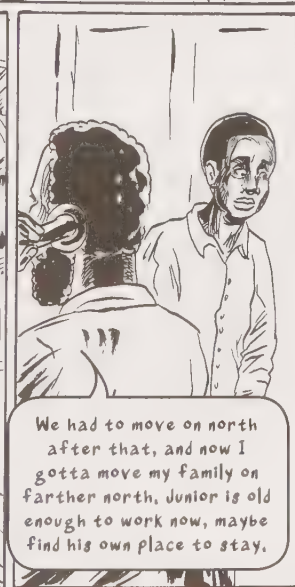
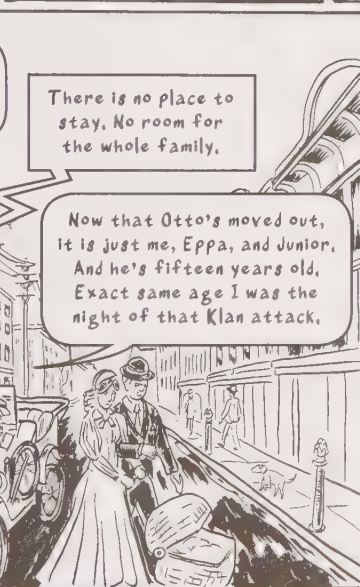
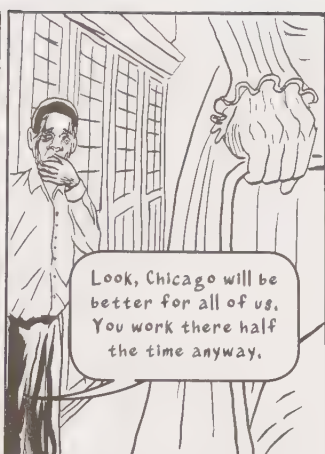
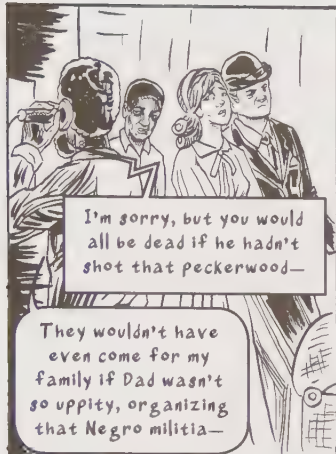
What do you mean?



When the Ku Kluxers were coming for your family at the Hall Plantation,

your father blew the head off the first man through the door of your cabin 'n' they all ran off scared!

Not before my mother was hurt. You know that! She miscarried and died soon after.



CHICAGO, 1920

EUREKA GRAND CHAPTER
CHICAGO

There being a quorum of officers and members present, the meeting of the Prince Hall Order of the Eastern Star is called to order.



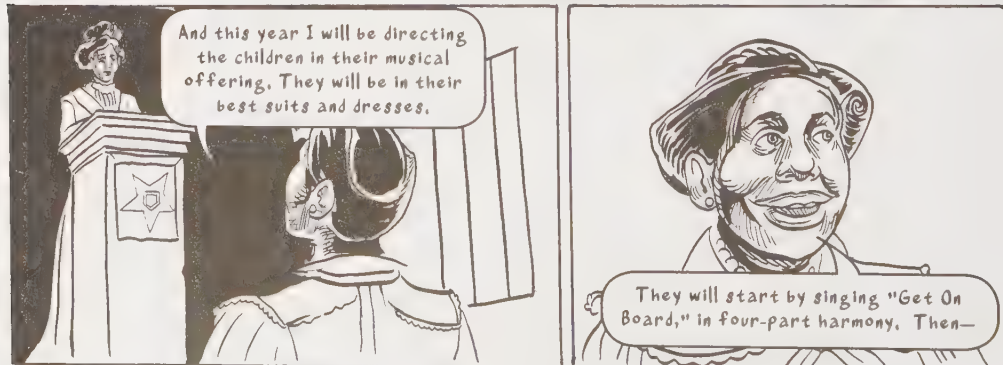
Sister Harriet, are the plans final for this year's commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation?

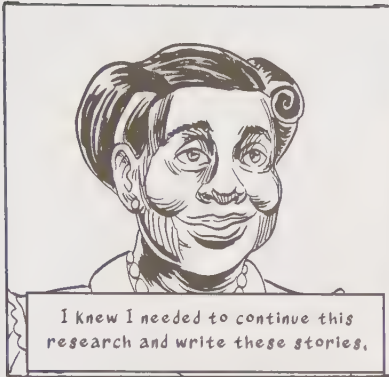
Yes, they are! We have a larger venue than last time.



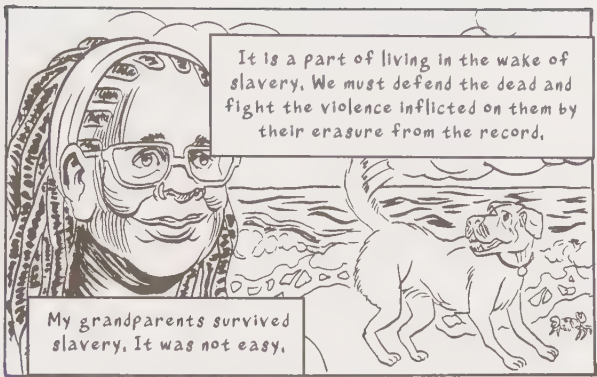
And this year I will be directing the children in their musical offering. They will be in their best suits and dresses.

They will start by singing "Get On Board," in four-part harmony. Then—



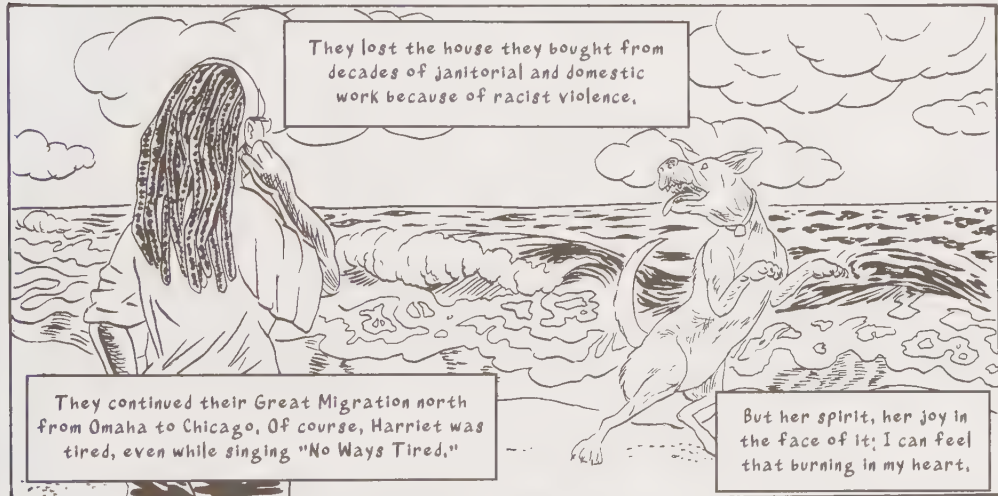


I knew I needed to continue this research and write these stories,



It is a part of living in the wake of slavery. We must defend the dead and fight the violence inflicted on them by their erasure from the record.

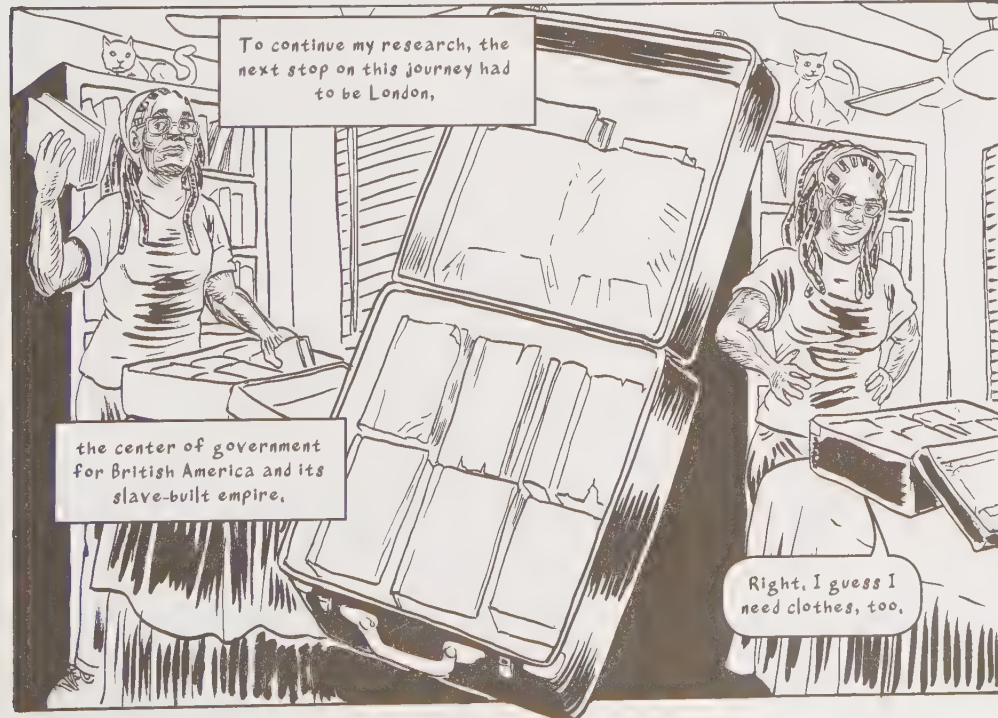
My grandparents survived slavery. It was not easy.



They lost the house they bought from decades of janitorial and domestic work because of racist violence.

They continued their Great Migration north from Omaha to Chicago. Of course, Harriet was tired, even while singing "No Ways Tired."

But her spirit, her joy in the face of it; I can feel that burning in my heart.



To continue my research, the next stop on this journey had to be London,

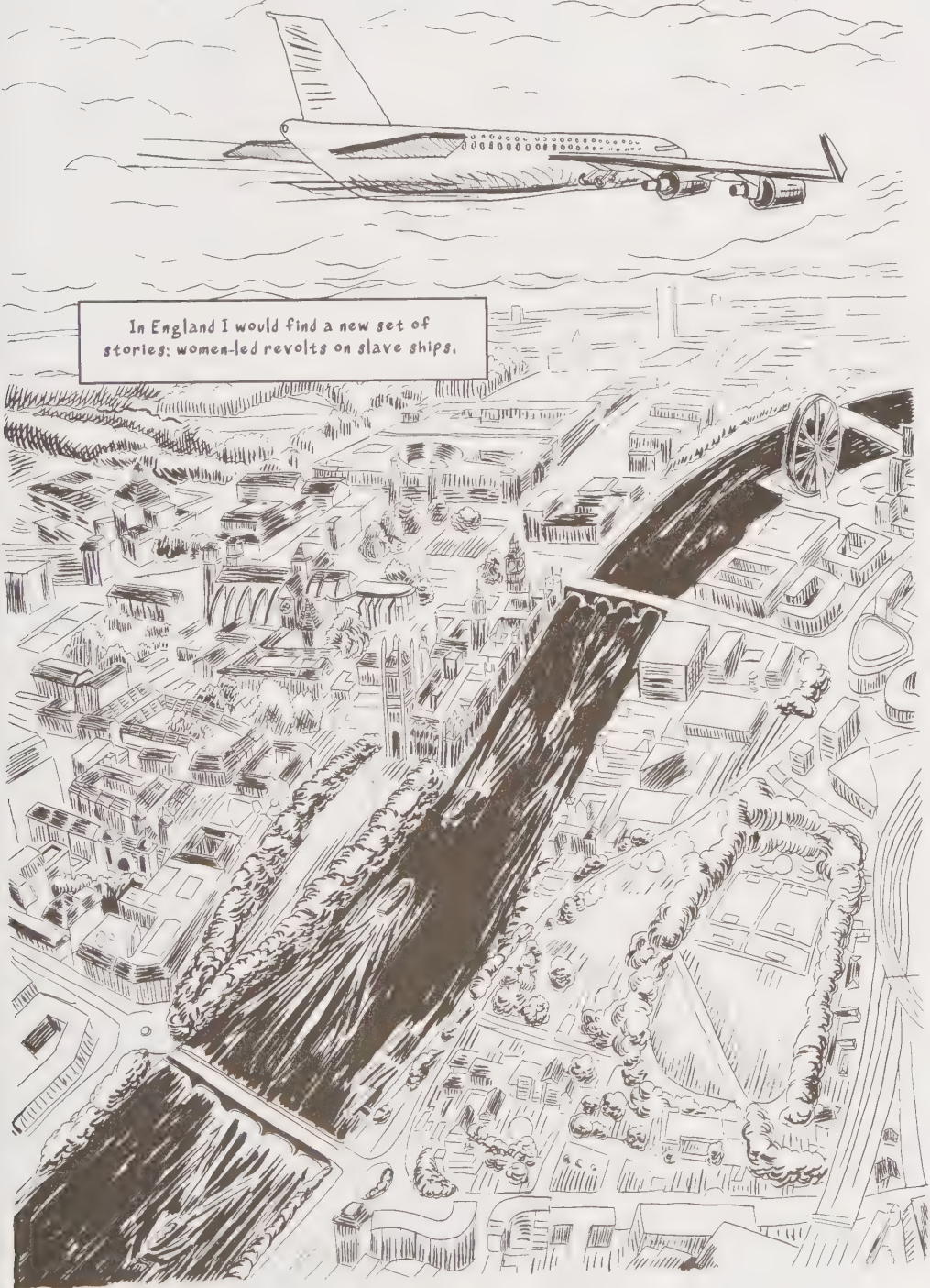
the center of government for British America and its slave-built empire.

Right, I guess I need clothes, too.

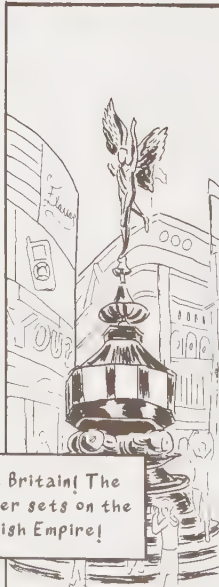
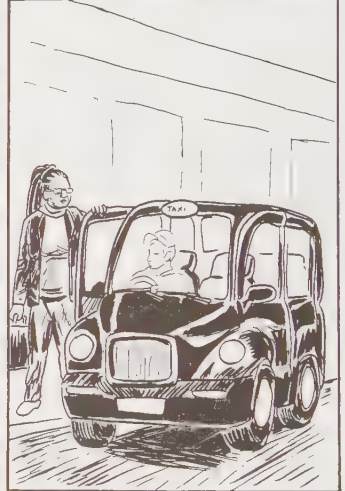
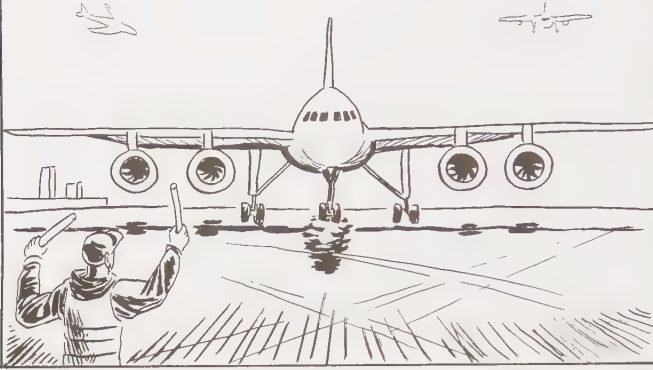
Chapter 7

England and the Slave Trade

In England I would find a new set of stories: women-led revolts on slave ships.



LONDON, ENGLAND, 2002



Great Britain! The sun never sets on the British Empire!



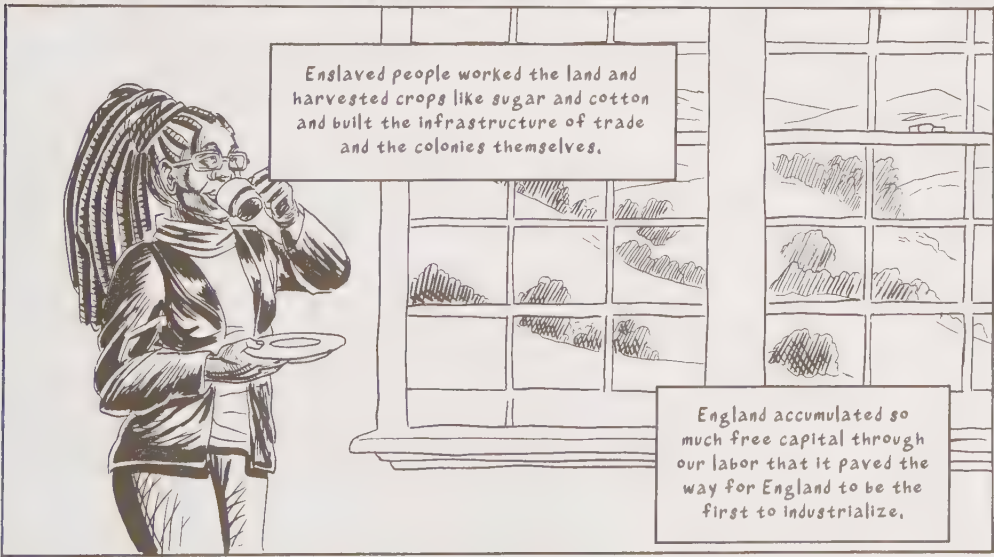


They take their tea and their sugar seriously

but would love everyone to forget that the tea comes from their colonization of Asia.

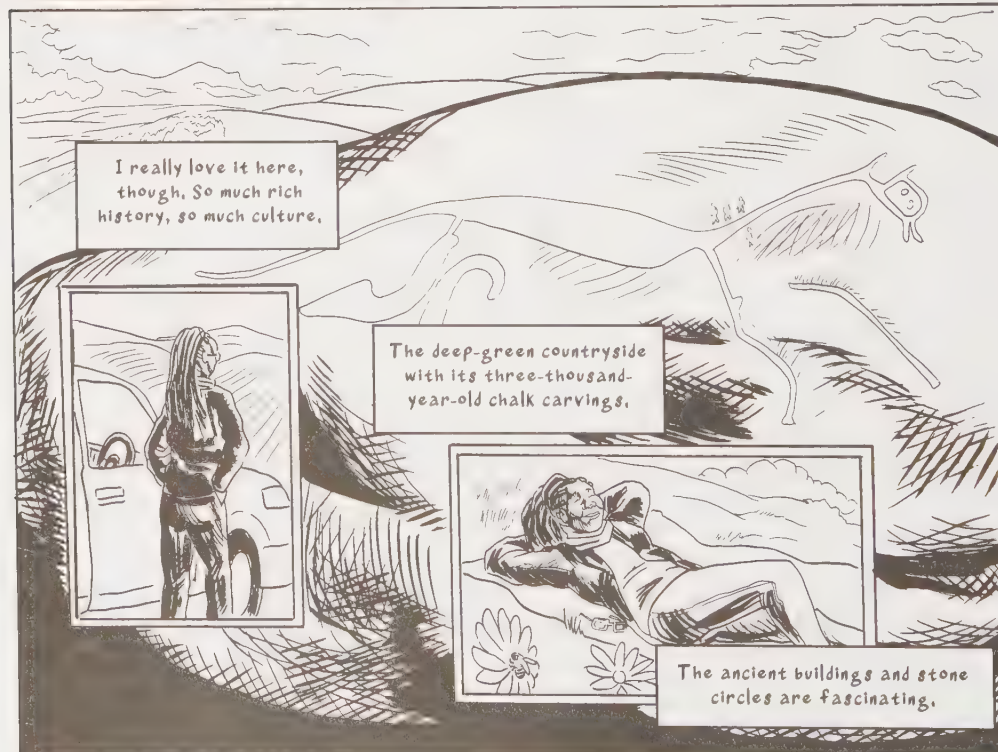
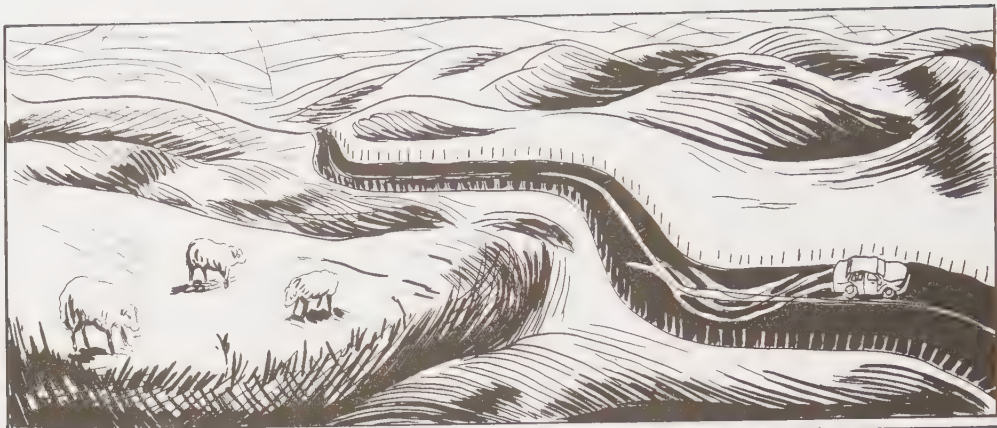
Sugar was another crop they availed themselves of after making good use of the labor of the enslaved.

And the harvesting of it was brutal.



Enslaved people worked the land and harvested crops like sugar and cotton and built the infrastructure of trade and the colonies themselves.

England accumulated so much free capital through our labor that it paved the way for England to be the first to industrialize.



I really love it here, though, so much rich history, so much culture.

The deep-green countryside with its three-thousand-year-old chalk carvings.



The ancient buildings and stone circles are fascinating.



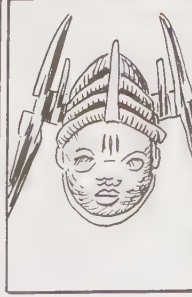
And the people are so nice and respectful, It feels so different than being Black at home.




My Afro-Brit friends say that they are nice to me because they know I won't be staying.



And this spot looks like the evidence room for a crime.



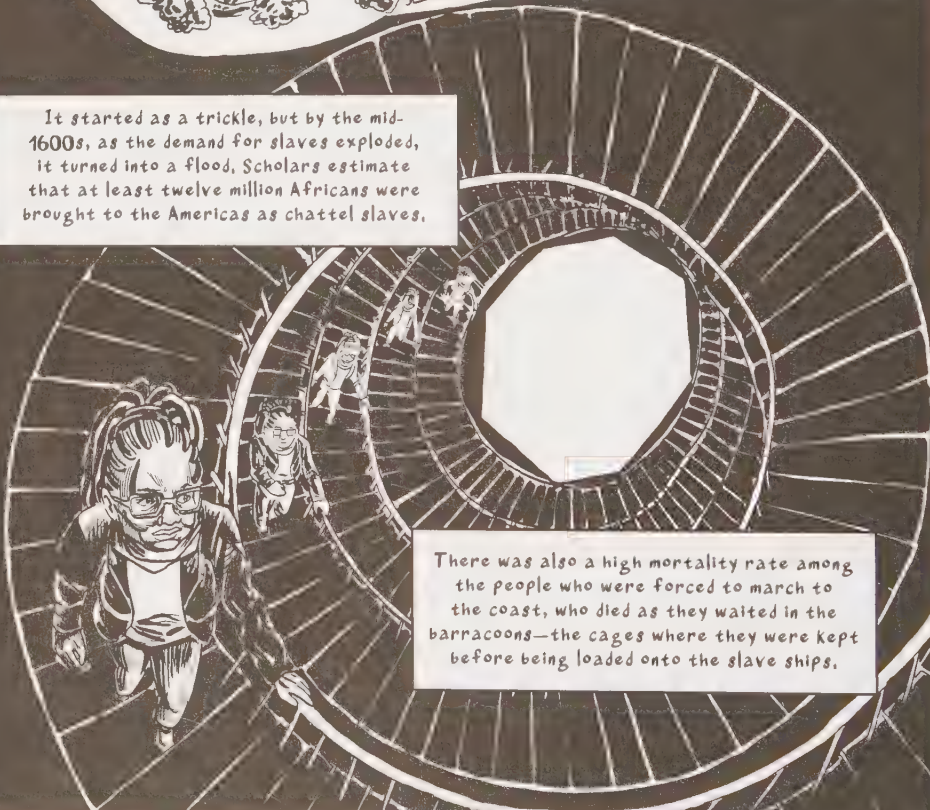


I've come to the parliamentary archives to begin my search for more information on women in slave revolts. And who knows, maybe either here or at the public records office I can find out what happened to Sarah or Abigail, and the name of the Negro Fiend, the one who was burned at the stake after the 1708 revolt.

What I've found instead is a lot of information about the slave trade, the Middle Passage, and women in slave ship revolts.

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade spanned four hundred years, from the late 1400s to the late 1800s. England didn't really become a player until the mid-1600s, but what they lost in time they made up for in numbers.

It started as a trickle, but by the mid-1600s, as the demand for slaves exploded, it turned into a flood. Scholars estimate that at least twelve million Africans were brought to the Americas as chattel slaves.

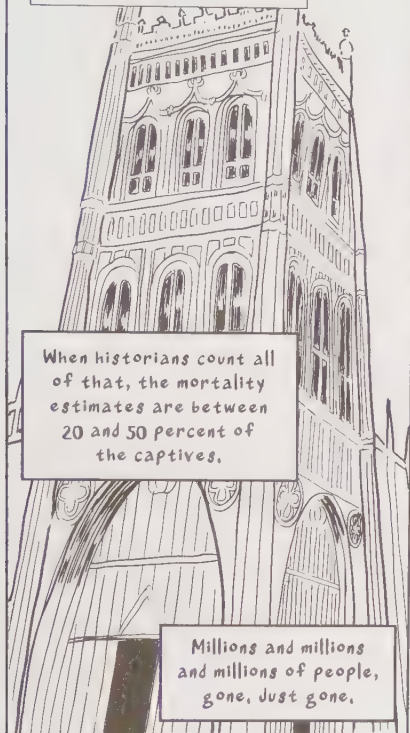


There was also a high mortality rate among the people who were forced to march to the coast, who died as they waited in the barracoons—the cages where they were kept before being loaded onto the slave ships.

It doesn't include the people who died waiting on the ships, shackled below as the slavers sailed from slave trading port to slave trading port down the coast of West Africa until they had just the right cargo. That alone could take weeks or months.

And they died during the Middle Passage itself. If they made it to the Americas, they died in the first year of "seasoning," as it was called, where they died of disease or were worked to death.

VICTORIA TOWER, HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT, LONDON



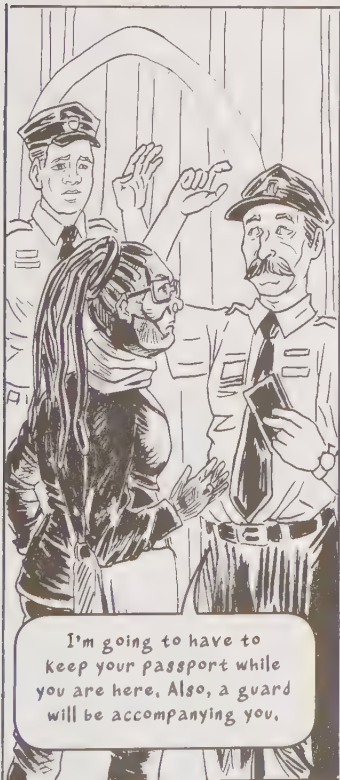
When historians count all of that, the mortality estimates are between 20 and 50 percent of the captives.

Millions and millions and millions of people, gone. Just gone.

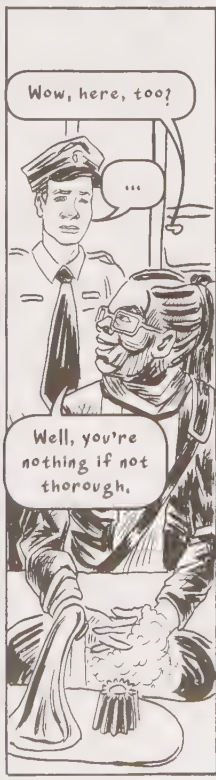
Good morning, I have an appointment to use the archives.



Passport, please.



I'm going to have to keep your passport while you are here. Also, a guard will be accompanying you.



Wow, here, too?

Well, you're nothing if not thorough.



How can I help you?

I would like to look at any records you have on slavery and the slave trade, eighteenth century.

We don't have anything here about slavery! Well, some things on the abolition of the slave trade, but that is nineteenth century.

But the slave trade itself was highly regulated by the British government.

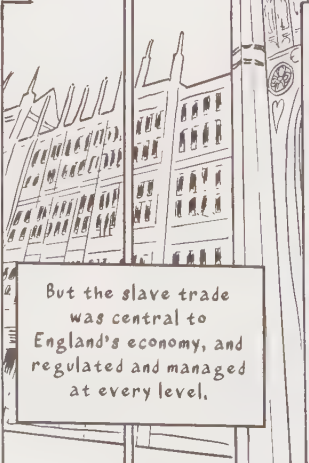
And this is an archive for the records of the British government.



Can you please go check?



The British would like us to think that their only role in the trade was its abolition.



But the slave trade was central to England's economy, and regulated and managed at every level.



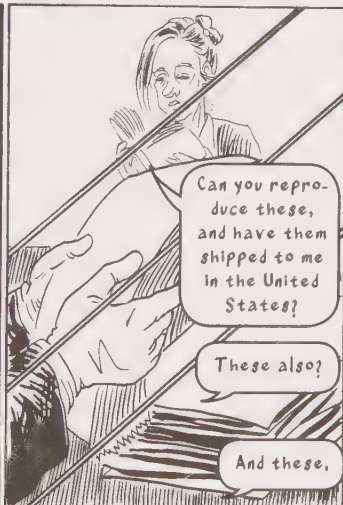
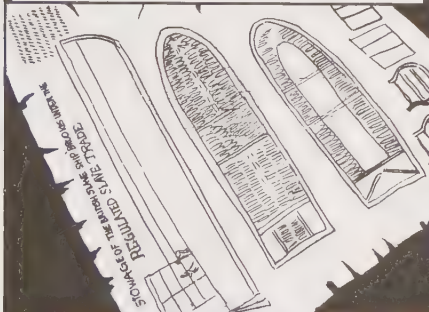


Laws created and maintained the trade, and the Crown gave out a monopoly on the trade to a company called the Royal African Company, John Locke, a luminary of the Enlightenment and perhaps the central theorist of American democracy, was a stockholder.



The infamous Brookes Diagram was itself created from the regulation of the slave trade,

You can see that if you look closely at the top: "Stowage of the British Ship Brookes under the REGULATED SLAVE TRADE." It demonstrated the maximum number of slaves allowed under the Slave Trade Act of 1788.



This is crucial history, and if it is taught in school at all, it is taught horribly. We are either told that Europeans went into West Africa and kidnapped helpless Africans living in Stone Age conditions,

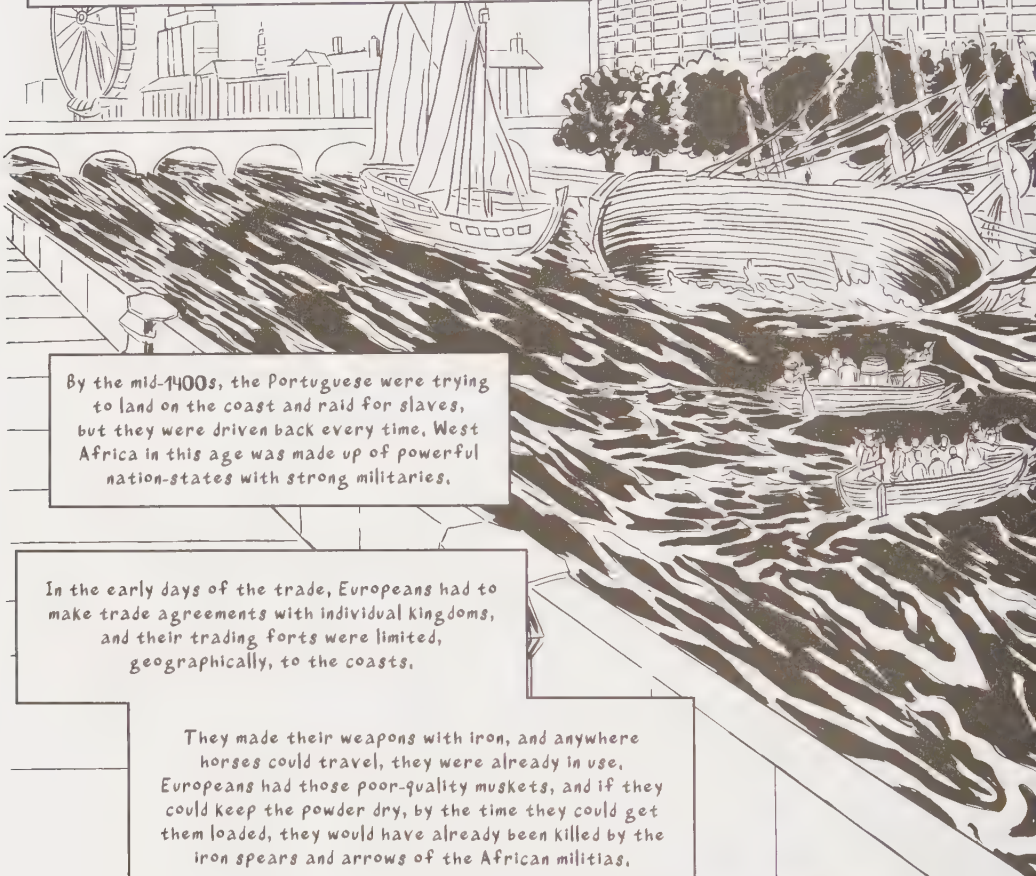


or we are taught the opposite: that Africans sold their own brothers and sisters into slavery while Europe innocently tapped into an existing supply.



Both of these paradigms are wrong. History is more complicated than either of these accounts, and history, by definition, is the study of change over time. A lot changed in the four-hundred-year sweep of Atlantic slave trade history.

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-1400s, 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 forts were limited, geographically, to the coasts.

They made their weapons with iron, and anywhere horses could travel, they were already in use. Europeans had those 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 militias.

In addition, slaves were traded in Africa, as they were pretty much everywhere else in the world. But the preexisting slaves 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 serfs in Europe.

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





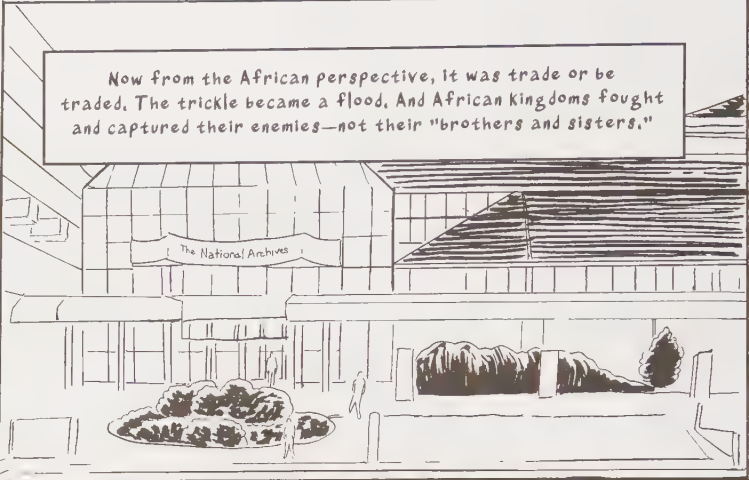
As time passed, two things changed; 1. As Europeans colonized the Americas, they needed huge amounts of labor, European demand for slaves skyrocketed, And 2, European military technology improved, and outstripped that of West African kingdoms.

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."

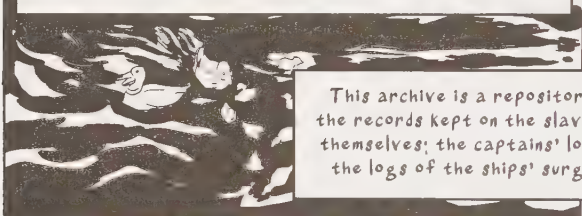
They would trade one gun for one captive. In order for these kingdoms to protect their people from being traded by rival kingdoms, they would have to capture and trade their enemies to get guns.




Now from the African perspective, it was trade or be traded. The trickle became a flood. And African kingdoms fought and captured their enemies—not their “brothers and sisters.”



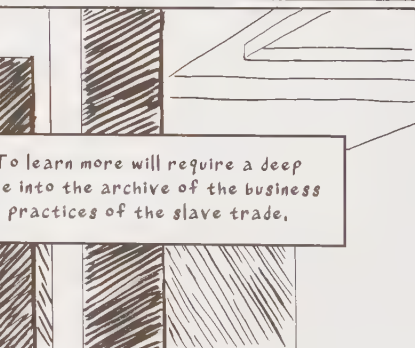
There was no concept of an “Africa” back then. That is a twentieth-century construct. They fought with rival nations and ethnic groups and fortified their kingdoms with as much European weaponry as possible.



This archive is a repository for the records kept on the slave ships themselves; the captains’ logs and the logs of the ships’ surgeons.



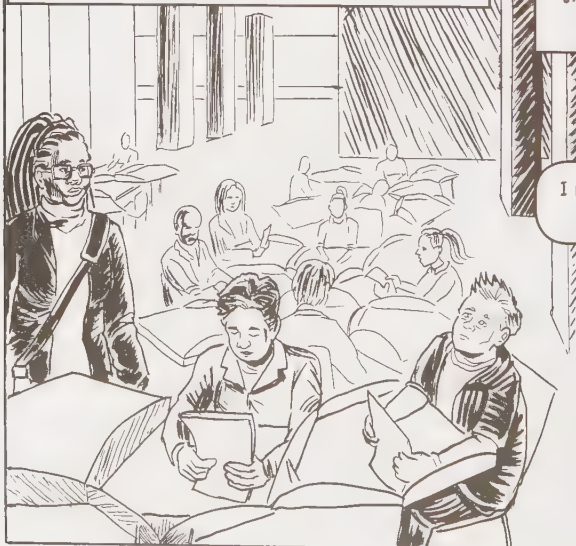
Captains and surgeons were required to keep detailed information on each voyage, so they could be accountable to their investors, the Royal African Company regulators, the British government, and slave ship insurance companies.

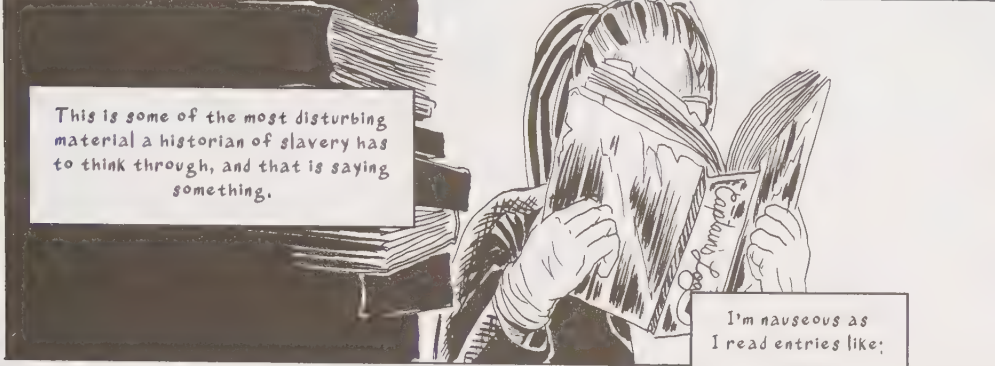


To learn more will require a deep dive into the archive of the business practices of the slave trade.



I better get comfortable. I will be here awhile.





This is some of the most disturbing material a historian of slavery has to think through, and that is saying something.

I'm nauseous as I read entries like:

May 20: "got 200 Slaves, 425 Slaves on board

*Died a Man Slave No. 8.

*Departs Whydah on May 31, 1770."

or this:

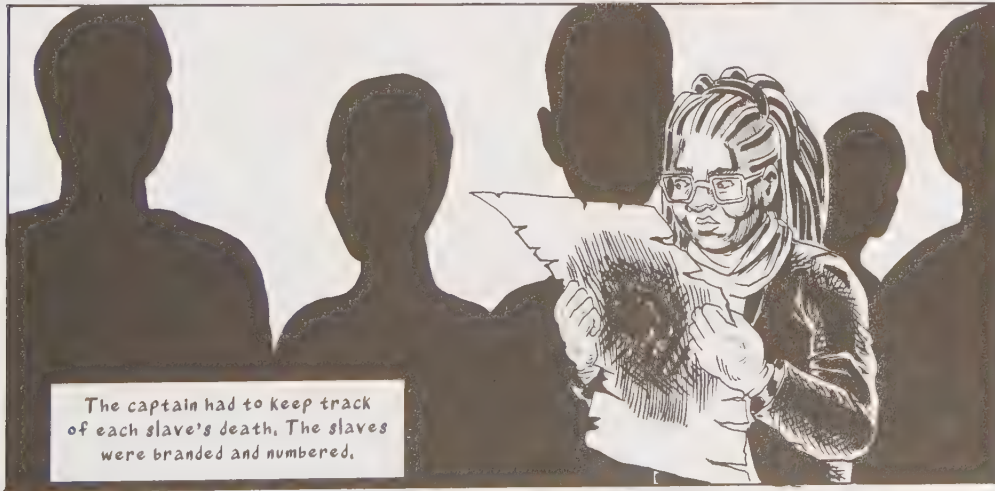
June 7: "Slaves pretty healthy, little else remarkable."

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

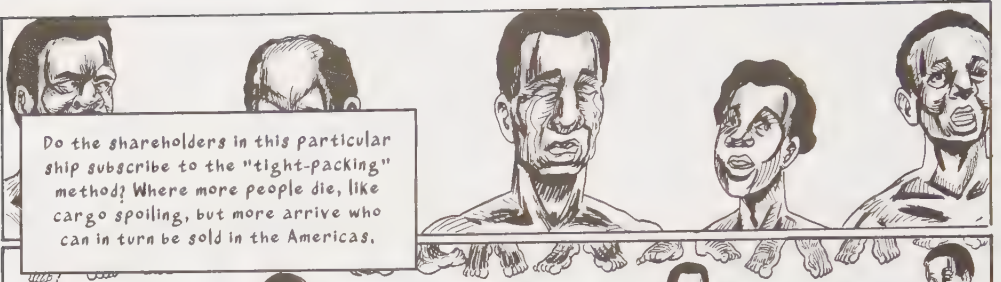
June 14: "died a Woman No. 10. Of Captain Moneypenny's purchase."

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

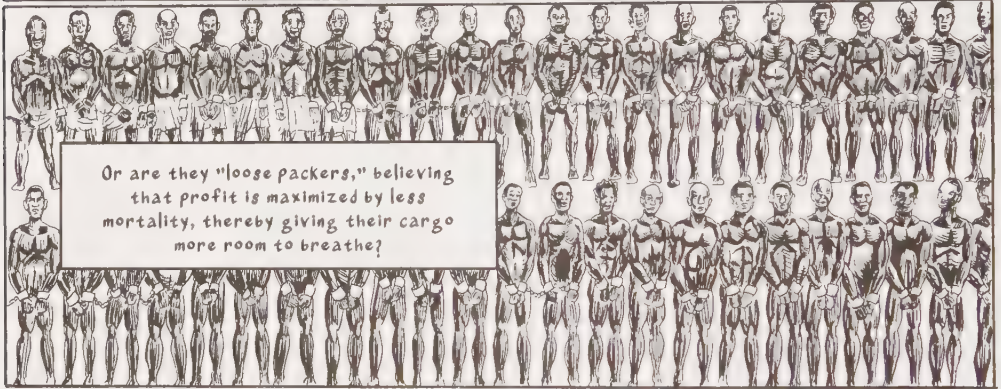
June 16: "died a Woman Slave No. 12."



The captain had to keep track of each slave's death. The slaves were branded and numbered.



Do the shareholders in this particular ship subscribe to the "tight-packing" method? Where more people die, like cargo spoiling, but more arrive who can in turn be sold in the Americas.

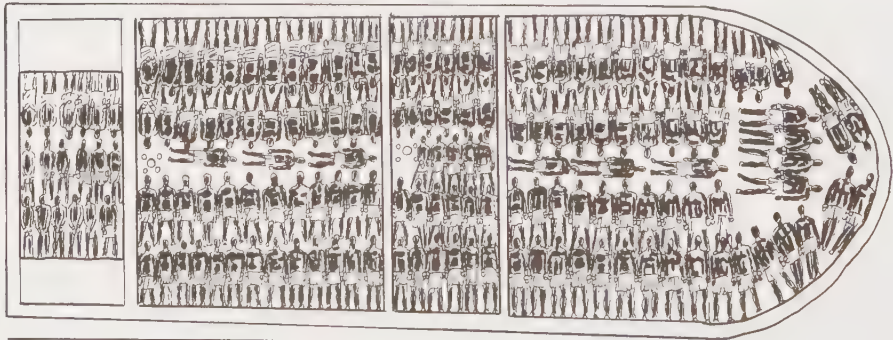


Or are they "loose packers," believing that profit is maximized by less mortality, thereby giving their cargo more room to breathe?

It is a complex business turning people into things. Things that can be stored, shipped, and sold.

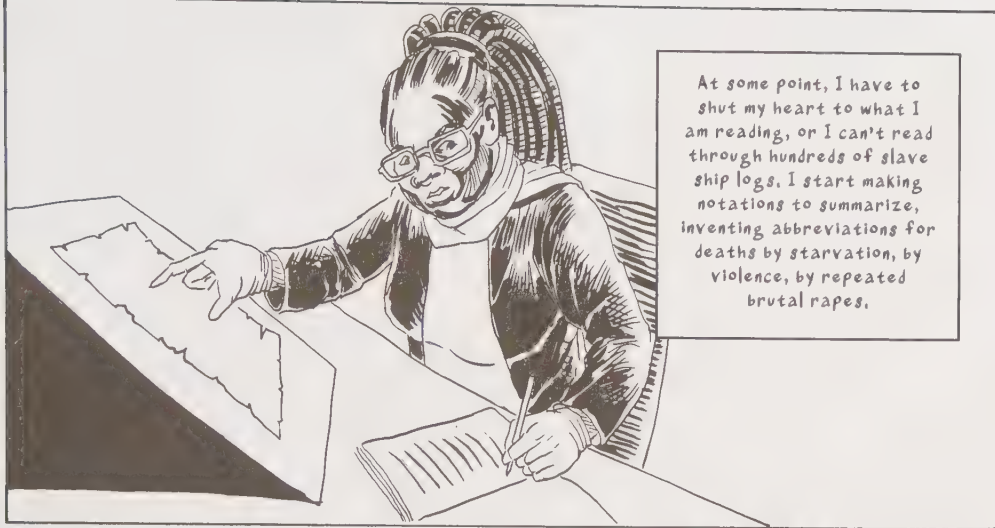
PLAN OF LOWER DECK WITH STORAGE OF 272 SLAVES

130 OF THESE SLAVES BEING STOWED UNDER THE SHELVES AS SHOWN IN FIGURES 5 & FIGURES 6

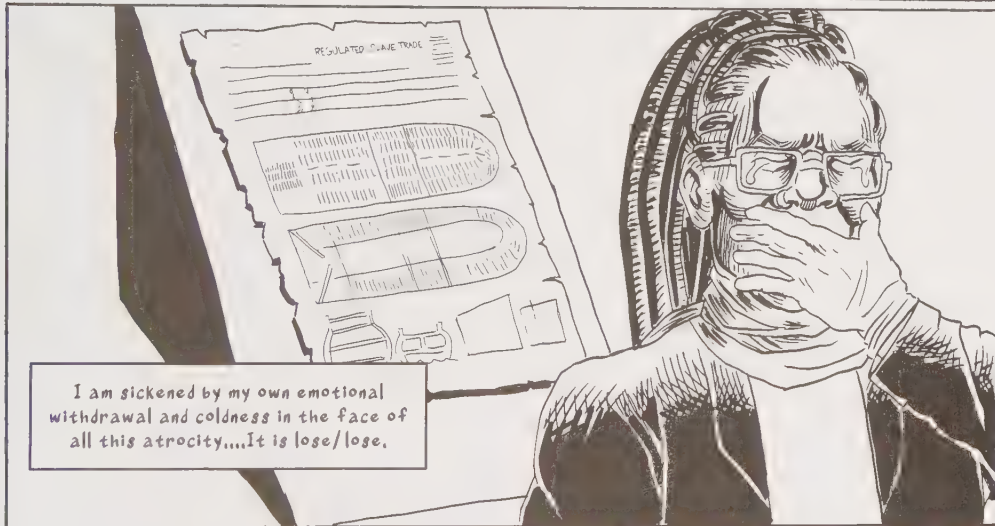


My eyes glaze at the calculations on person-to-tonnage ratios, and how to be most efficient in arranging the cargo.

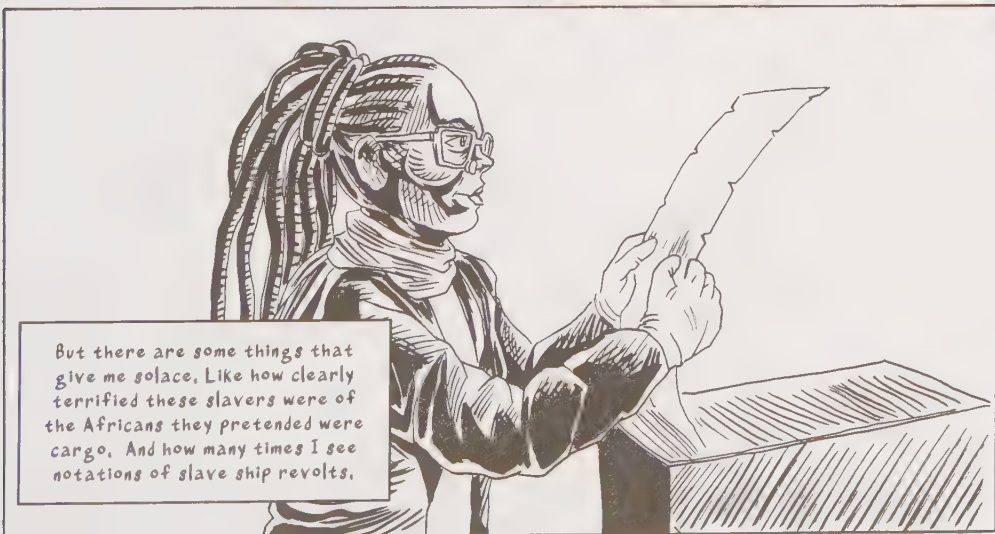
And it is not easy for a historian to comb through these documents, feeling a combination of stultifying boredom, anger, and constant nausea.




At some point, I have to shut my heart to what I am reading, or I can't read through hundreds of slave ship logs. I start making notations to summarize, inventing abbreviations for deaths by starvation, by violence, by repeated brutal rapes,



I am sickened by my own emotional withdrawal and coldness in the face of all this atrocity....It is lose/lose.



But there are some things that give me solace. Like how clearly terrified these slavers were of the Africans they pretended were cargo. And how many times I see notations of slave ship revolts.



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

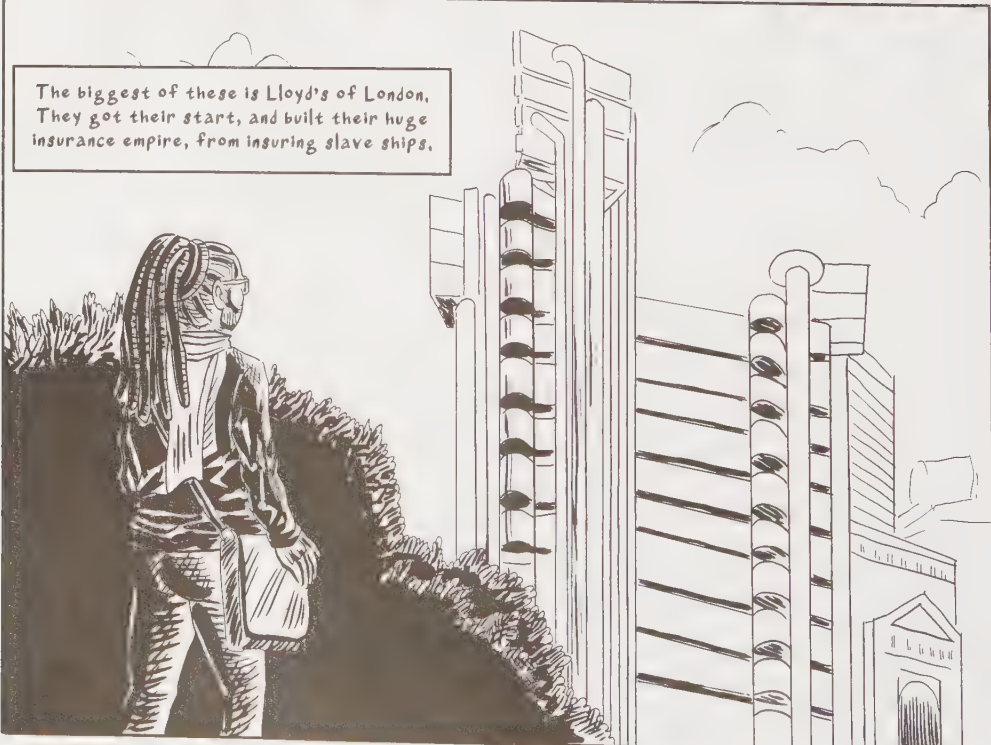
So when the captain's log is turned in to the insurance company, they will be reimbursed for each death, in the provision of the policy called...

The Insurrection of Cargo.

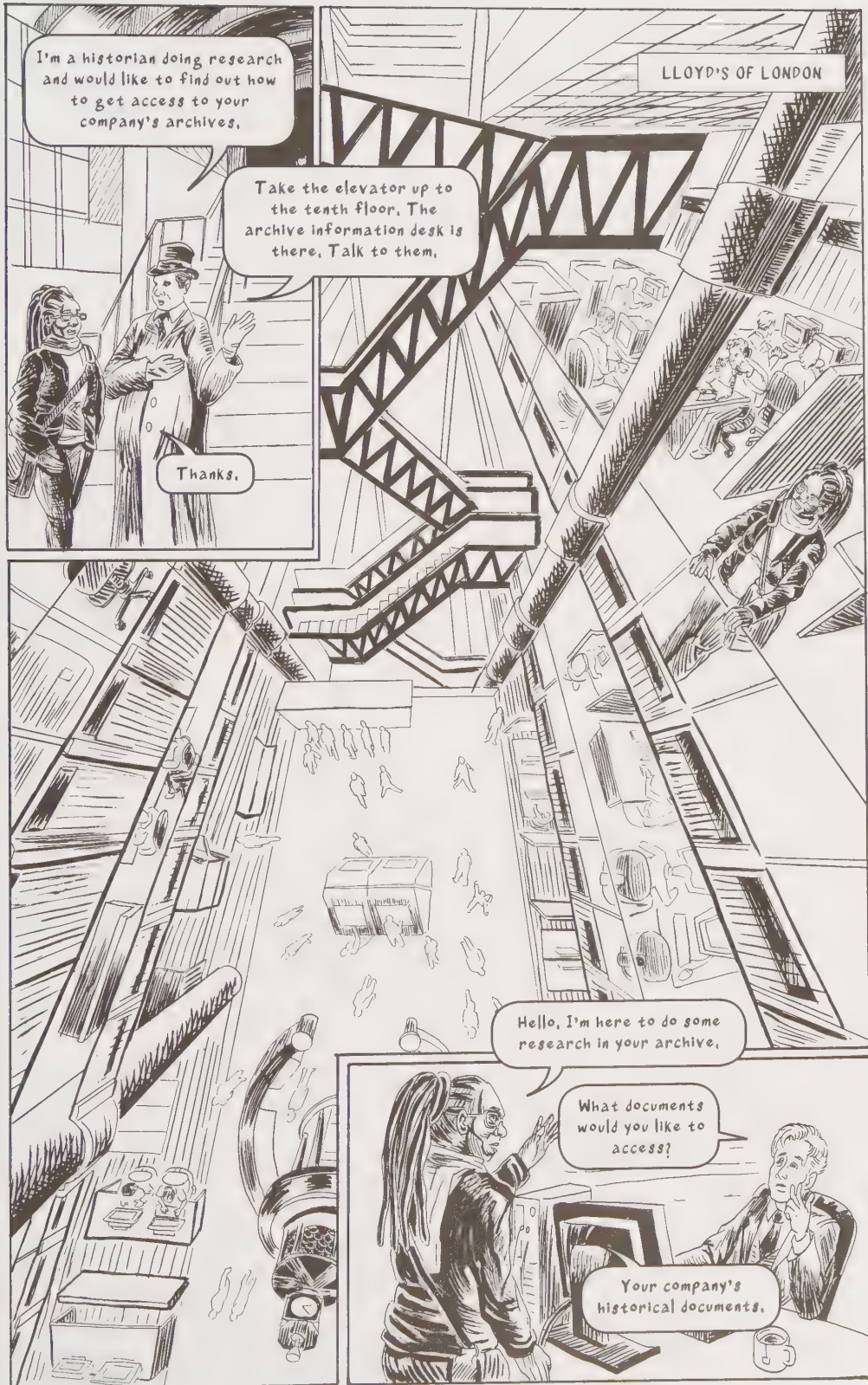


I want to see these insurers' records!

Many of these companies are still around.



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



LLOYD'S OF LONDON

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

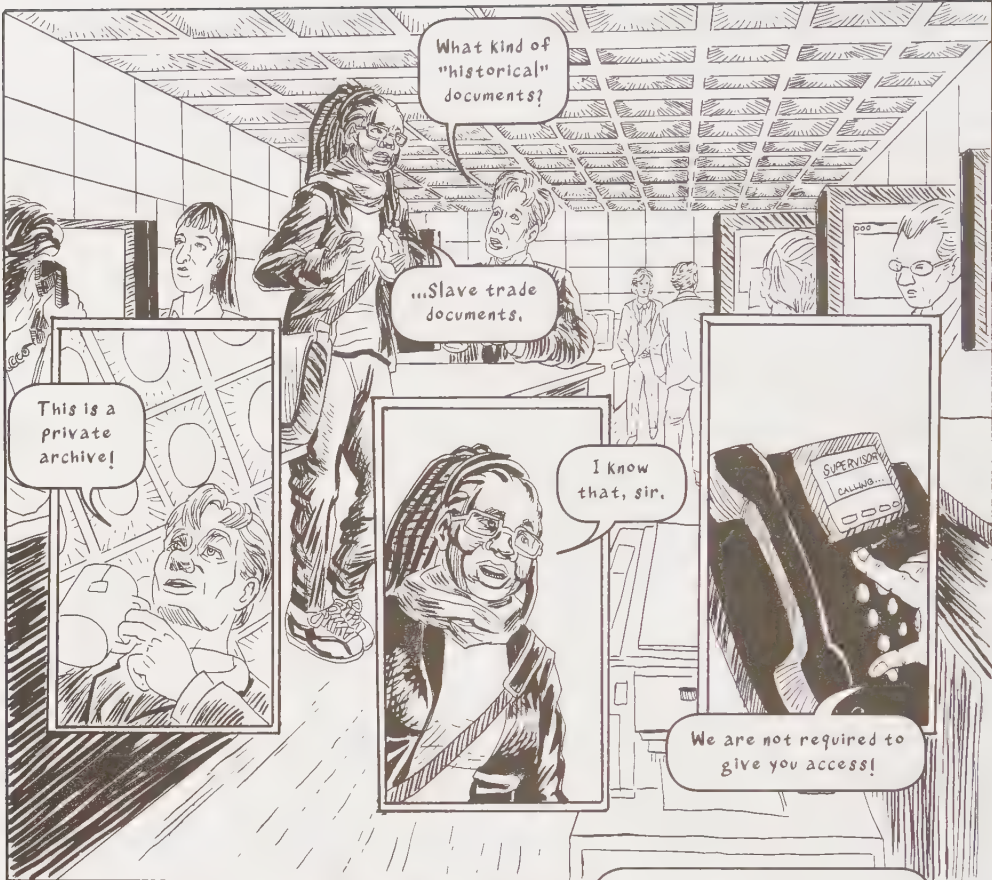
Take the elevator up to the tenth floor. The archive information desk is there. Talk to them.

Thanks.

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

What documents would you like to access?

Your company's historical documents.



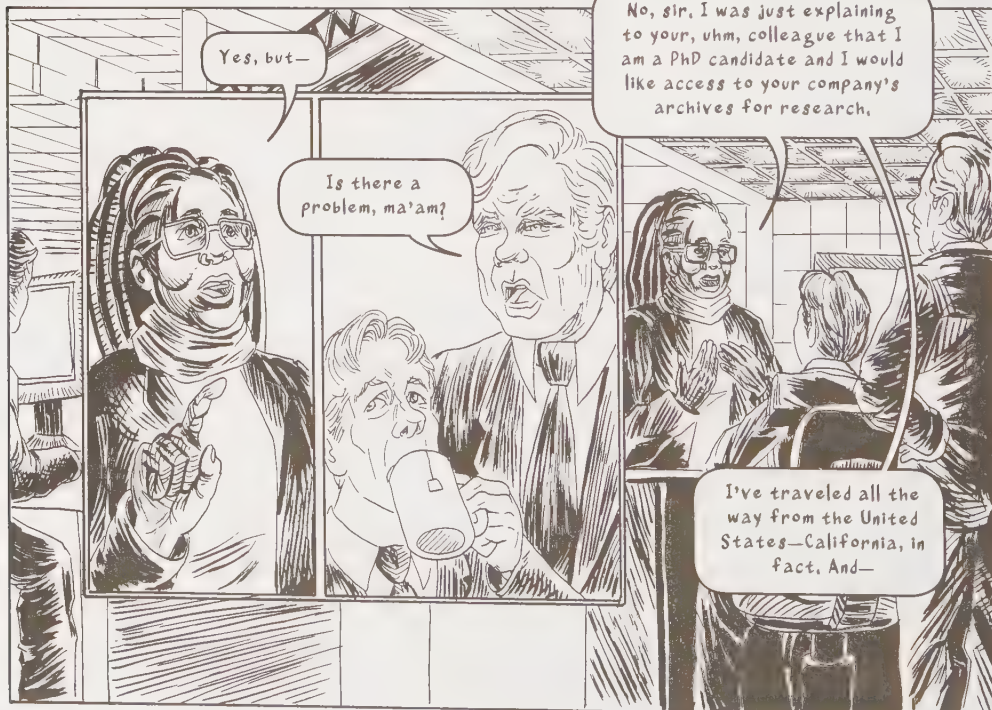
What kind of "historical" documents?

...Slave trade documents.

This is a private archive!

I know that, sir.

We are not required to give you access!

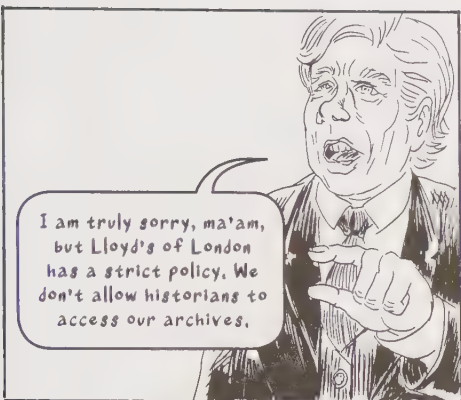


Yes, but—

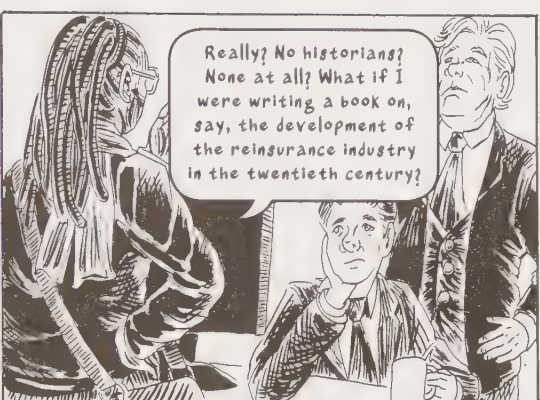
No, sir, I was just explaining to your, uh, colleague that I am a PhD candidate and I would like access to your company's archives for research.

Is there a problem, ma'am?

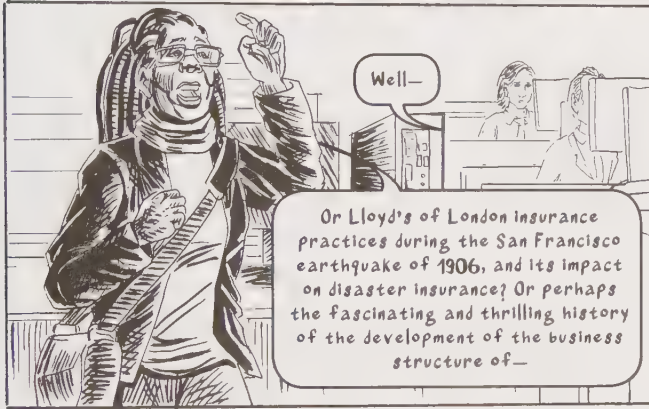
I've traveled all the way from the United States—California, in fact. And—



I am truly sorry, ma'am, but Lloyd's of London has a strict policy. We don't allow historians to access our archives.



Really? No historians? None at all? What if I were writing a book on, say, the development of the reinsurance industry in the twentieth century?

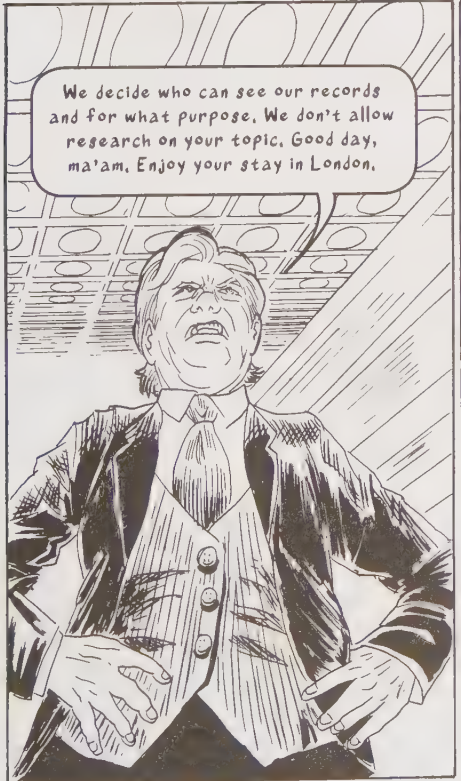


Well—

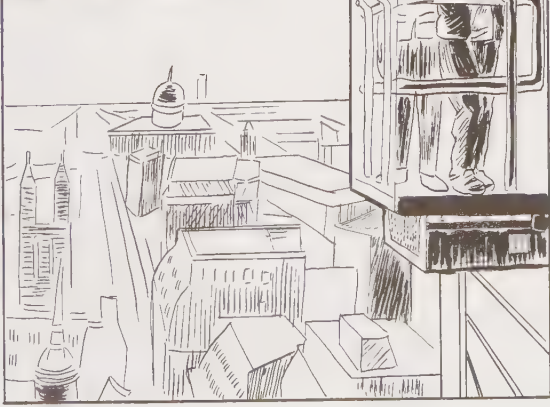
Or Lloyd's of London insurance practices during the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, and its impact on disaster insurance? Or perhaps the fascinating and thrilling history of the development of the business structure of—



That's enough, I take your point. Now take mine.



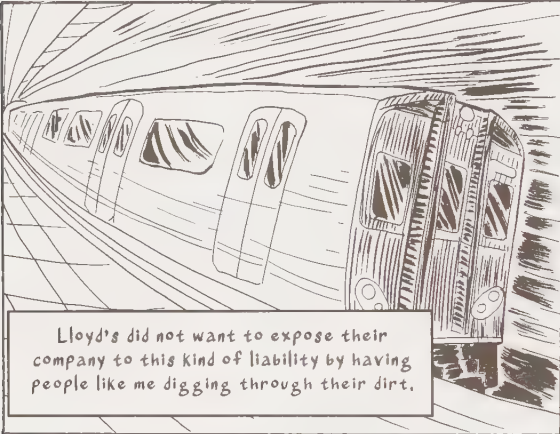
We decide who can see our records and for what purpose. We don't allow research on your topic. Good day, ma'am. Enjoy your stay in London.






Lloyd's of London, and later other insurance companies, made big bank insuring the slave trade and slavery.

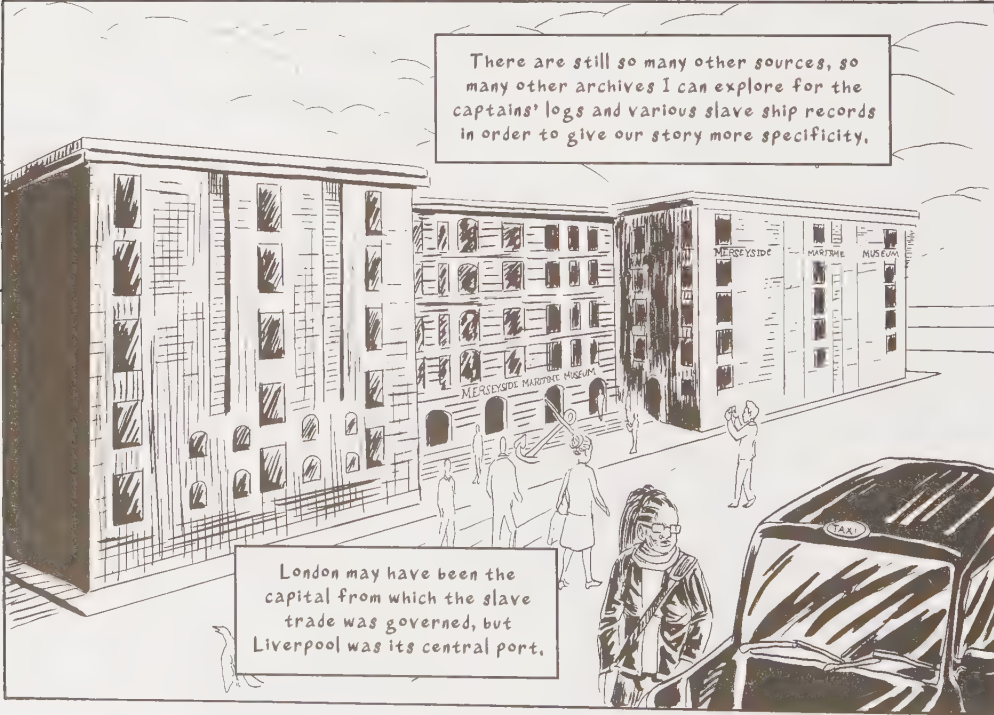
As historians excavated the documents showing this, Black people began to sue.



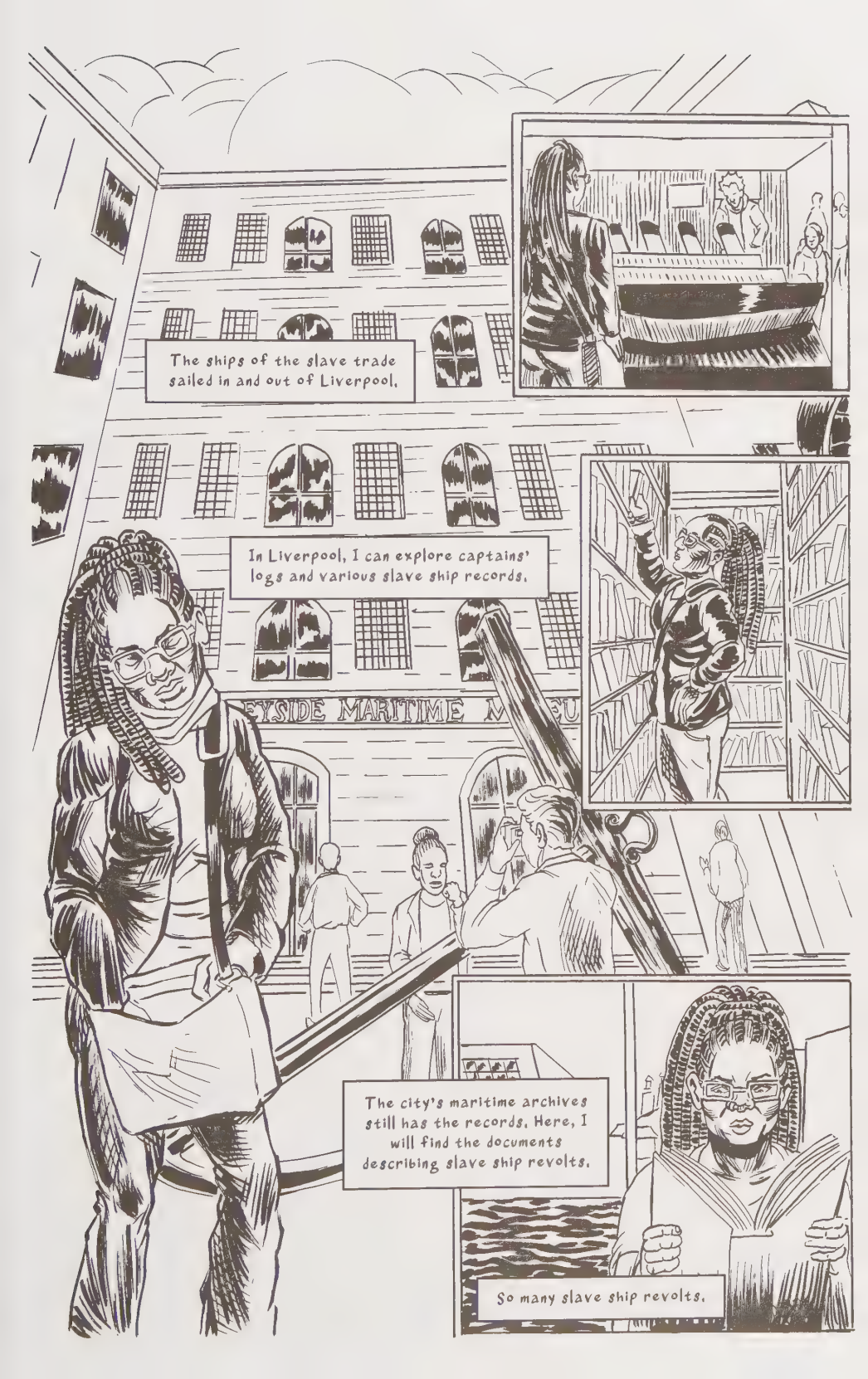
Lloyd's did not want to expose their company to this kind of liability by having people like me digging through their dirt.



There are still so many other sources, so many other archives I can explore for the captains' logs and various slave ship records in order to give our story more specificity.



London may have been the capital from which the slave trade was governed, but Liverpool was its central port.



The ships of the slave trade sailed in and out of Liverpool.

In Liverpool, I can explore captains' logs and various slave ship records.

The city's maritime archives still has the records. Here, I will find the documents describing slave ship revolts.

So many slave ship revolts.

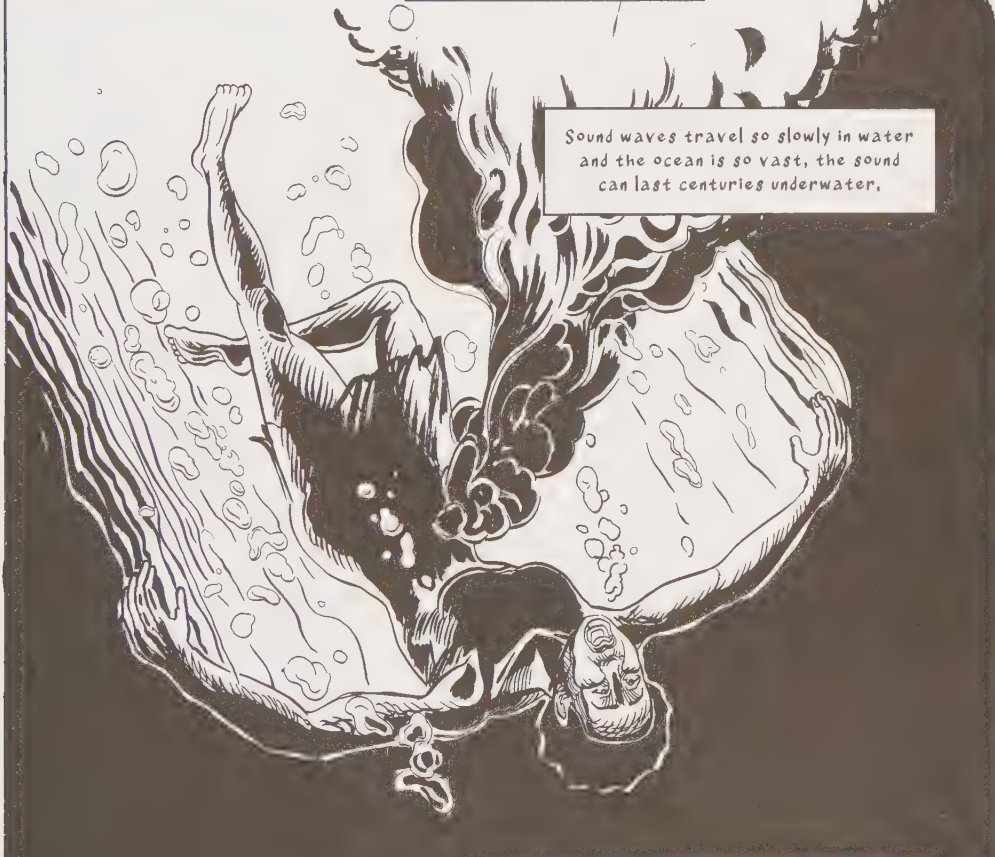


Chapter 8

The Insurrection of Cargo


In Unity!

They say that sound travels differently in water,



Sound waves travel so slowly in water
and the ocean is so vast, the sound
can last centuries underwater,

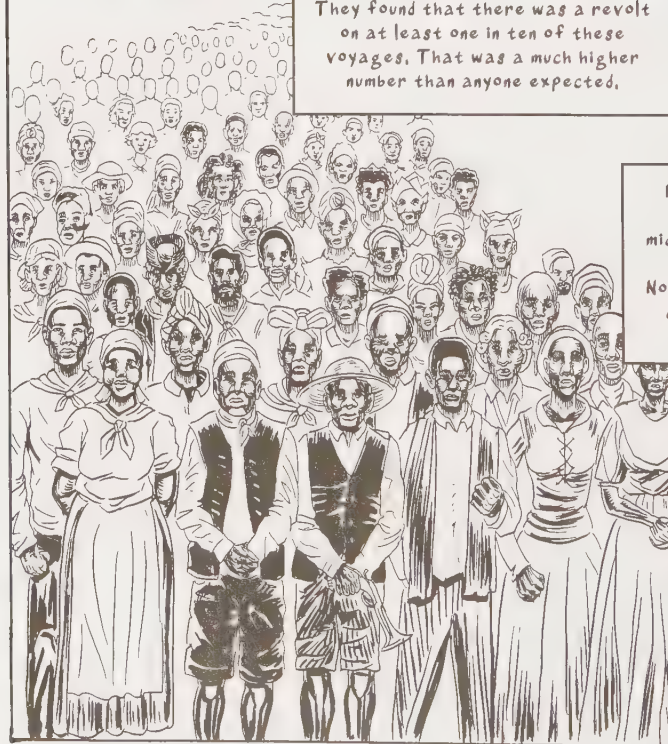
Maybe, if we listen carefully, we can hear them.

A person with long dreadlocks is shown from the back, looking at a large grid chart or data table. The chart has several columns and rows, with some cells containing numbers. The person is wearing a light-colored t-shirt.

Historians who search the archives for documentation of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade are a specialized group. It is a hard, long, and often lonely endeavor, but in the 1990s, some historians started using new digital technologies and began pooling their resources.



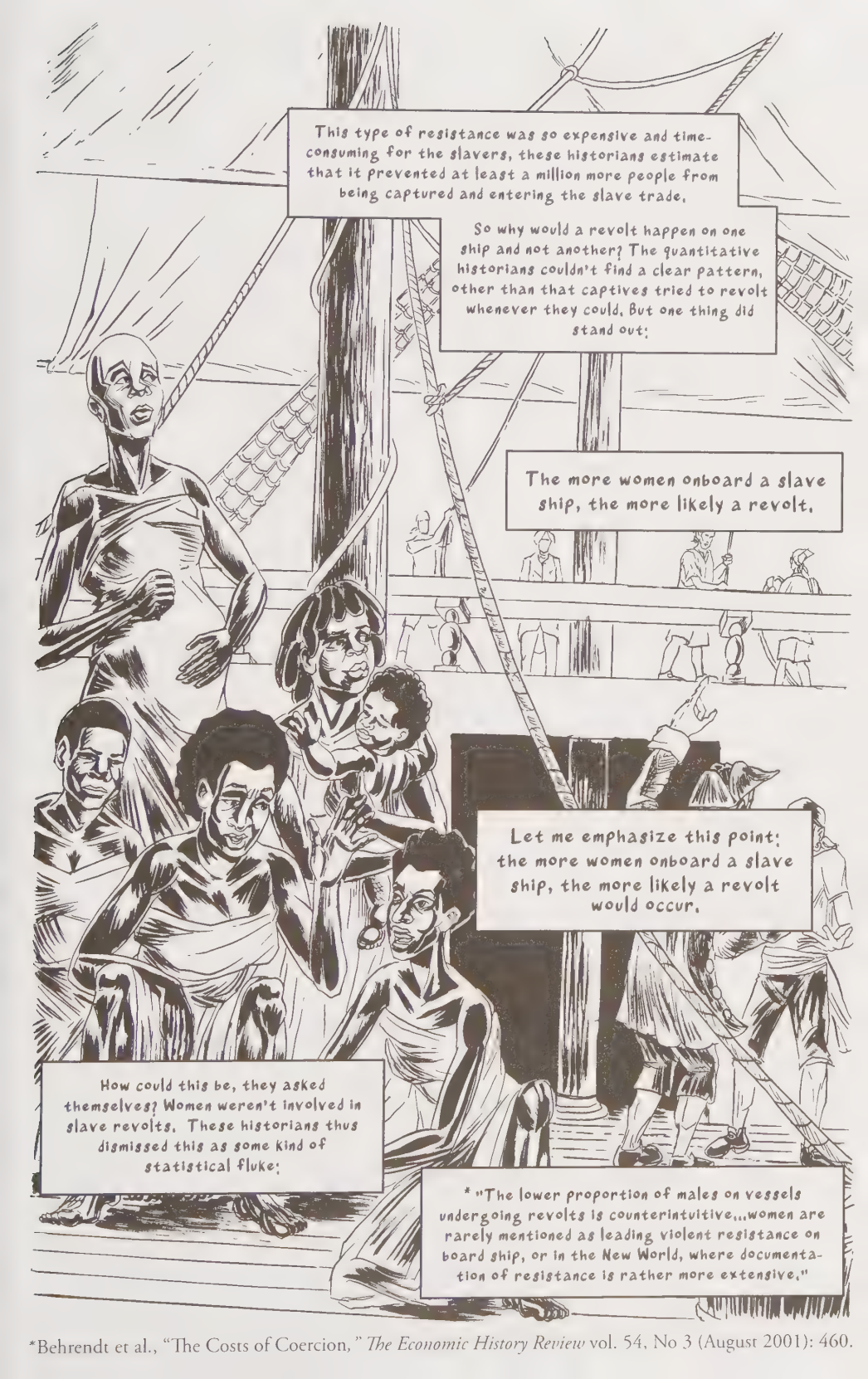
Quantitative historians, who use statistical tools to study big-picture historical trends, created a vast database of research on more than 36,000 slave ship voyages that took place over four hundred years.

A large crowd of diverse people, including men, women, and children of various ethnicities, are shown. Some are wearing traditional or historical clothing. The crowd is dense and fills the lower half of the panel.

They found that there was a revolt on at least one in ten of these voyages. That was a much higher number than anyone expected.

Revolts were never easy, but revolts on slave ships in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean were basically suicide missions. Nonetheless, many captives chose death over this exceptionally horrid new kind of slavery.

They chose to die rather than survive the horrors of the Middle Passage. They were equally determined to take their captors with them to the bottom of the ocean.



This type of resistance was so expensive and time-consuming for the slavers, these historians estimate that it prevented at least a million more people from being captured and entering the slave trade.

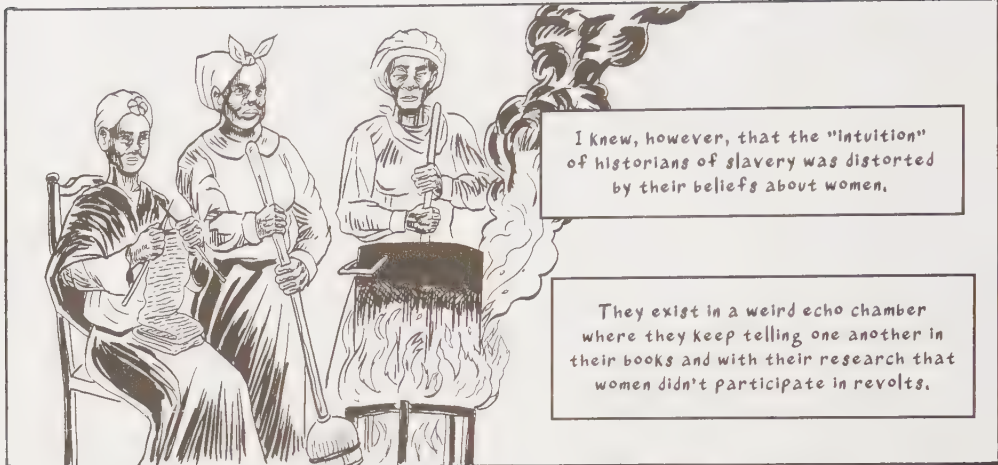
So why would a revolt happen on one ship and not another? The quantitative historians couldn't find a clear pattern, other than that captives tried to revolt whenever they could, but one thing did stand out:

The more women onboard a slave ship, the more likely a revolt.

Let me emphasize this point: the more women onboard a slave ship, the more likely a revolt would occur.

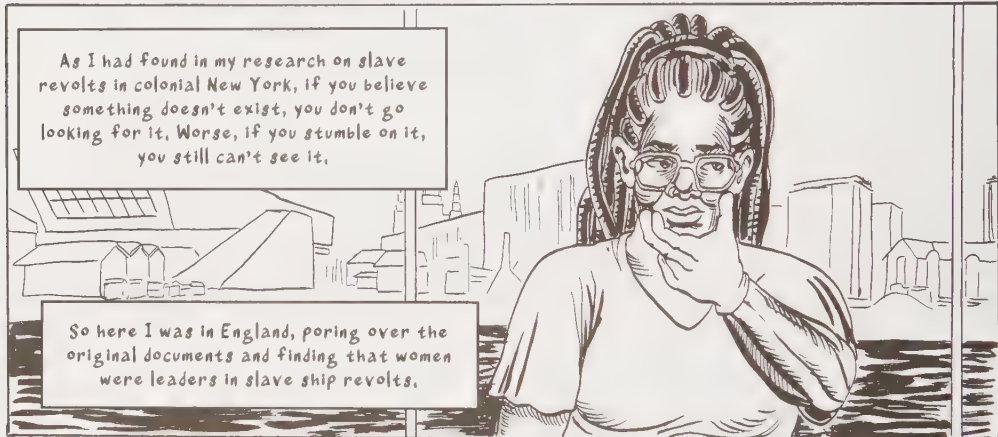
How could this be, they asked themselves? Women weren't involved in slave revolts. These historians thus dismissed this as some kind of statistical fluke:

* "The lower proportion of males on vessels undergoing revolts is counterintuitive...women are rarely mentioned as leading violent resistance on board ship, or in the New World, where documentation of resistance is rather more extensive."



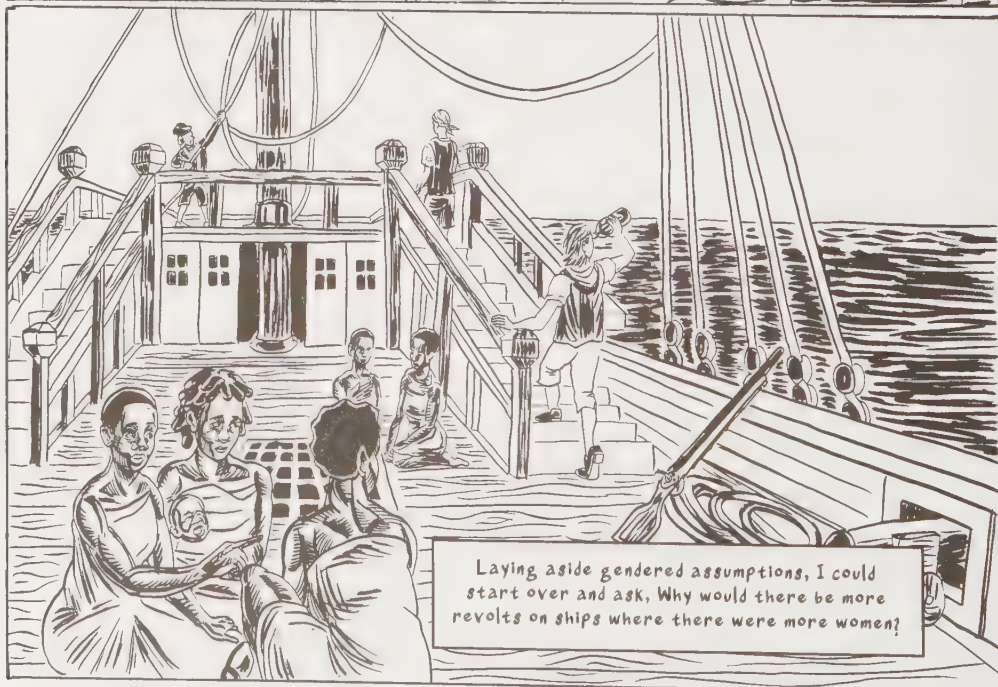
I knew, however, that the "intuition" of historians of slavery was distorted by their beliefs about women.

They exist in a weird echo chamber where they keep telling one another in their books and with their research that women didn't participate in revolts.

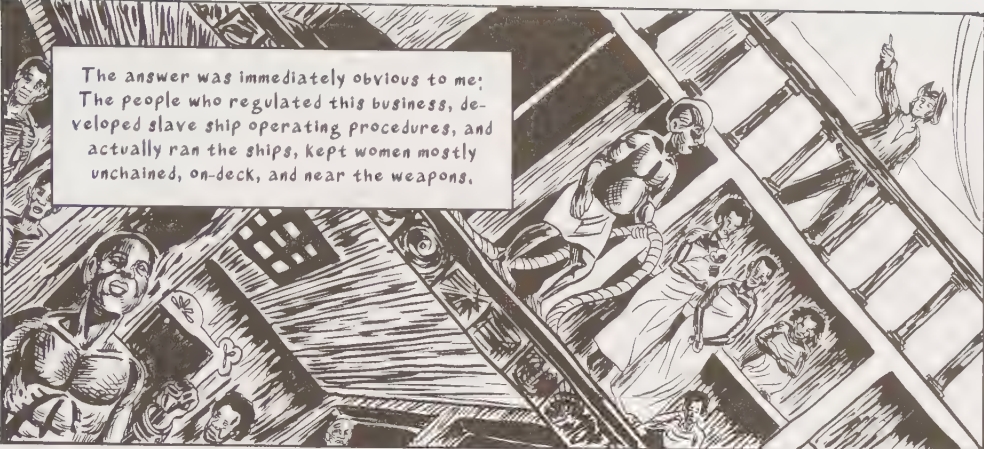


As I had found in my research on slave revolts in colonial New York, if you believe something doesn't exist, you don't go looking for it. Worse, if you stumble on it, you still can't see it.

So here I was in England, poring over the original documents and finding that women were leaders in slave ship revolts.



Laying aside gendered assumptions, I could start over and ask, Why would there be more revolts on ships where there were more women?



The answer was immediately obvious to me; The people who regulated this business, developed slave ship operating procedures, and actually ran the ships, kept women mostly unchained, on-deck, and near the weapons.



THE
UNITY
CAPTAINS
LOG

THE THOMAS
CAPTAINS LOG

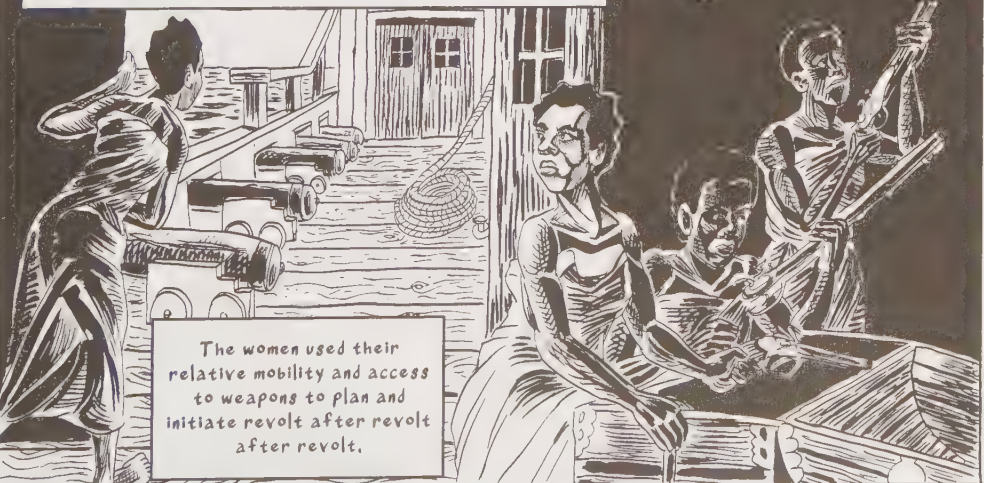
THE ANNAL
CAPTAINS LOG

THE EAGLE
CAPTAINS LOG

THE THAMES
CAPTAINS LOG

THE ROBERT
CAPTAINS LOG

*Report of the Lords of the Privy Council, 1789:
"The Slave, if a Man, is put in Irons on the Main
Deck; if a Boy, he is put on the Main Deck loose;
if a Woman or Girl, they are placed without Irons
on the Quarter Deck."*



The women used their relative mobility and access to weapons to plan and initiate revolt after revolt after revolt.

The purpose of generating all of this endless documentation was to set policy, maximize profits, and avoid costly revolts.



So why would the enforcers on the ships keep making the same stupid mistake, like the one mentioned in this captain's log?

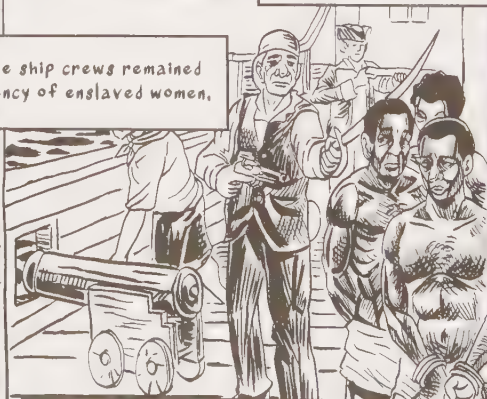
Two or three of the female slaves having discovered that the armorer had incautiously left the arms chest open . . .



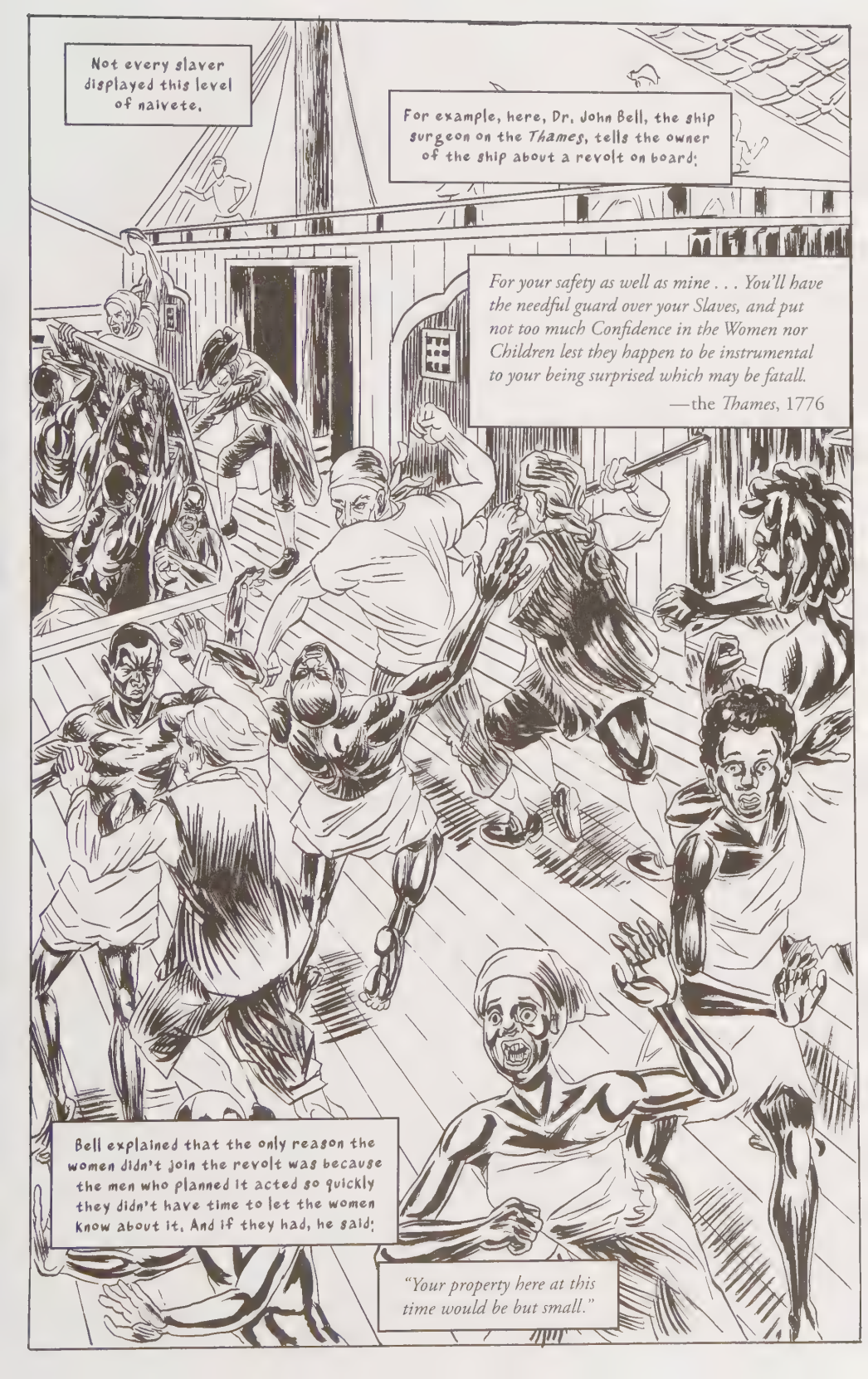
conveyed all the arms which they could find through the bulkheads to the male slaves, about two hundred of whom immediately ran up the forescuttles, and put to death all the crew who came in their way.

—the *Thomas*, 1797

Generally, the slave ship crews remained oblivious to the agency of enslaved women.



For example, a crewman aboard the *Eagle* in 1704 wrote that the crew was so worried about a revolt that they checked the *mens'* chains day and night, and a revolt happened anyway. They had no idea how it happened.



Not every slaver
displayed this level
of naivete.

For example, here, Dr. John Bell, the ship
surgeon on the *Thames*, tells the owner
of the ship about a revolt on board:

*For your safety as well as mine . . . You'll have
the needful guard over your Slaves, and put
not too much Confidence in the Women nor
Children lest they happen to be instrumental
to your being surprised which may be fatal.*

—the *Thames*, 1776

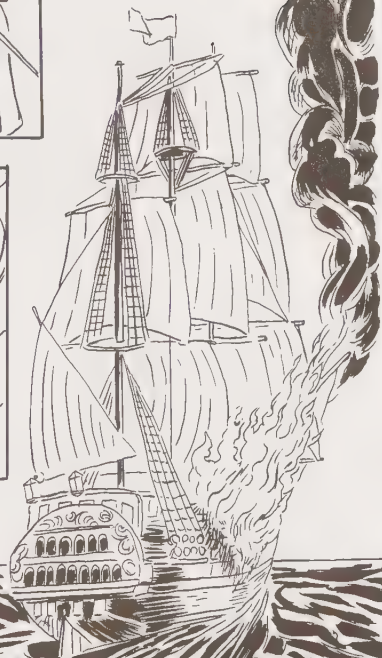
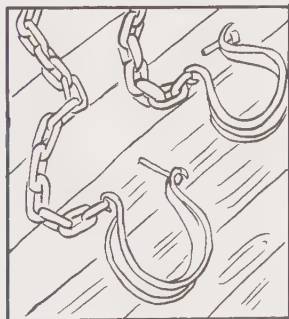
Bell explained that the only reason the
women didn't join the revolt was because
the men who planned it acted so quickly
they didn't have time to let the women
know about it. And if they had, he said:

*"Your property here at this
time would be but small."*



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





This was a dangerous time for slavers, because locals on shore would often raid the ships and free the slaves.

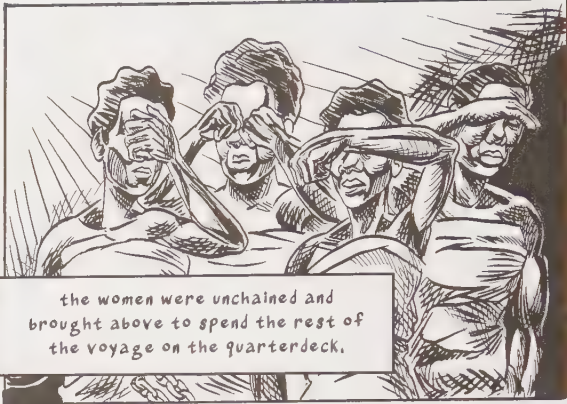


This was called a "cut off," and slavers took every precaution to avoid it happening.

Most cut offs were not successful.



Once the ship was away from the coast,

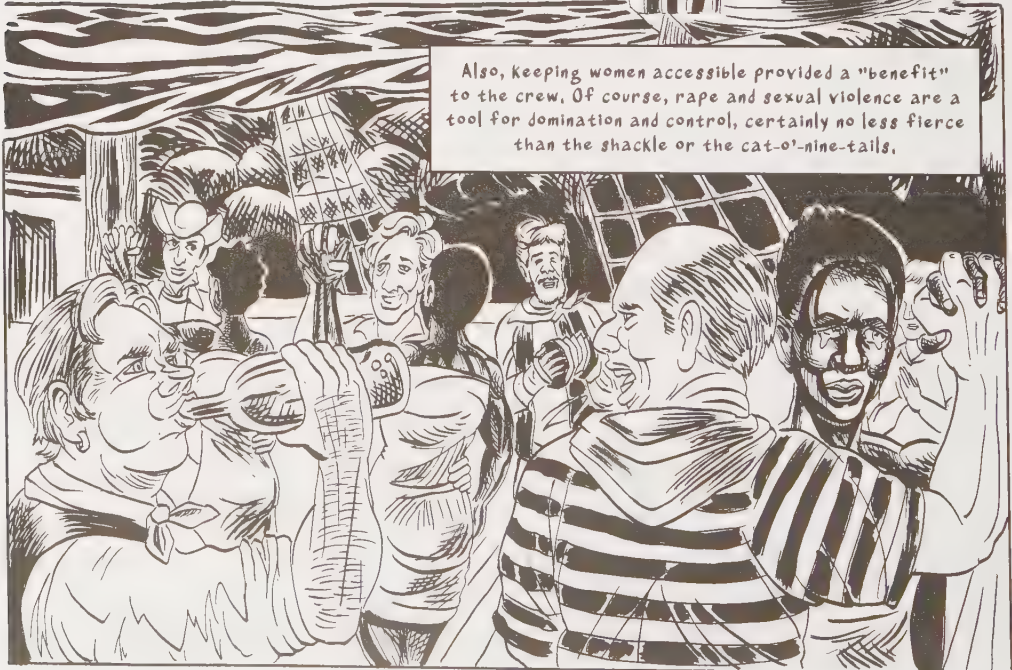
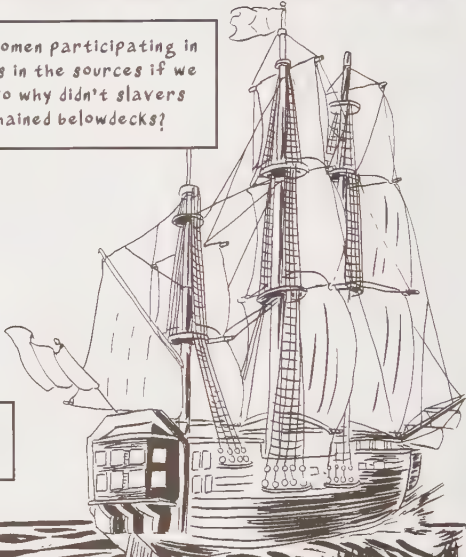


the women were unchained and brought above to spend the rest of the voyage on the quarterdeck.

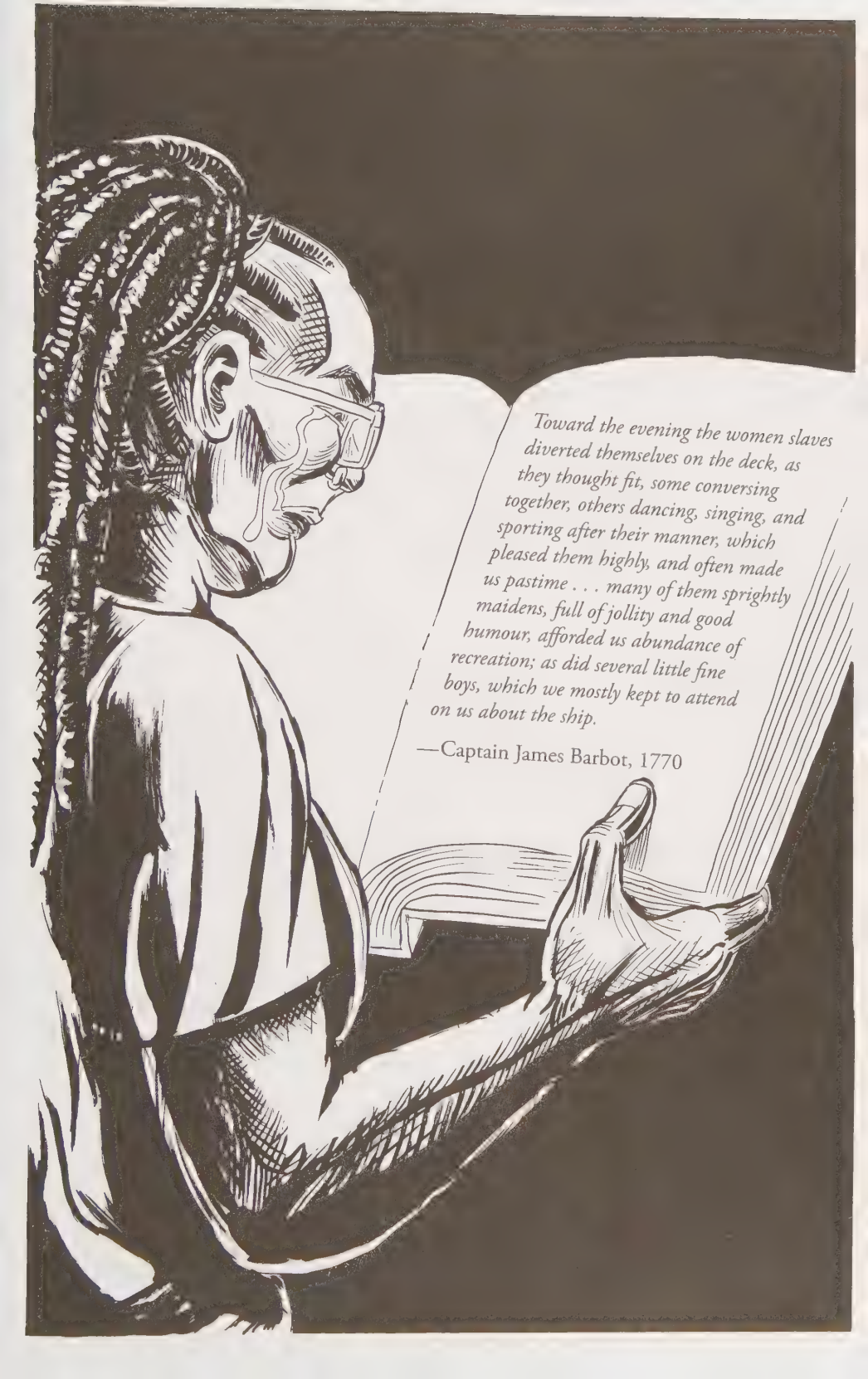


For one, they believed that women wouldn't be fighters.

We can see the women participating in shipboard revolts in the sources if we look for them. So why didn't slavers keep women chained belowdecks?

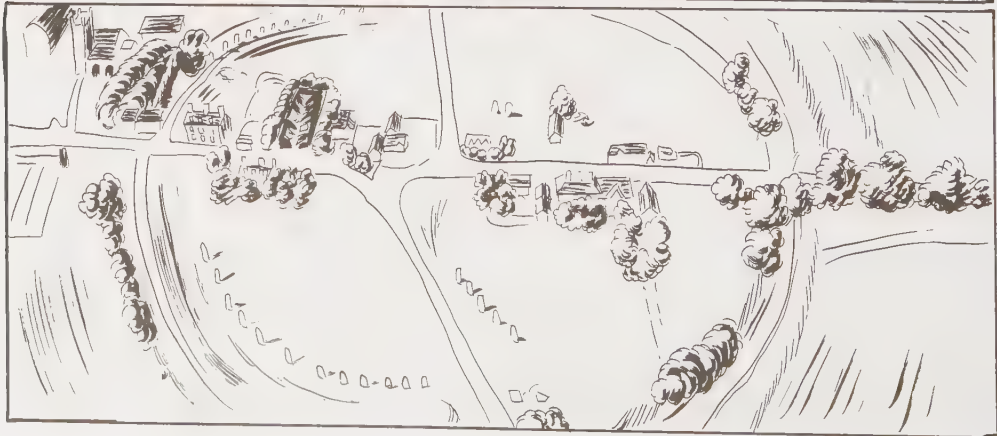
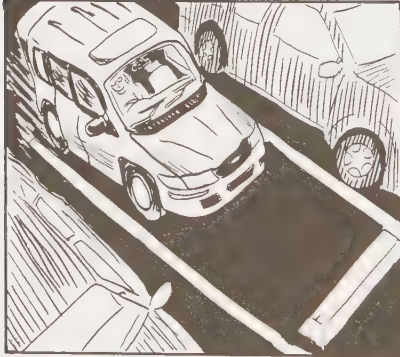
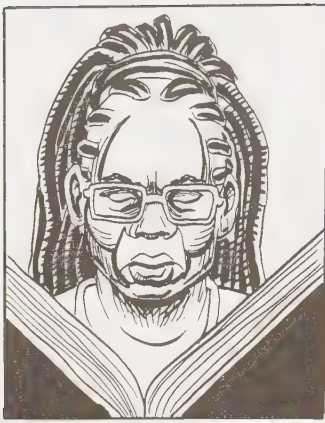


Also, keeping women accessible provided a "benefit" to the crew. Of course, rape and sexual violence are a tool for domination and control, certainly no less fierce than the shackle or the cat-o'-nine-tails,



*Toward the evening the women slaves
diverted themselves on the deck, as
they thought fit, some conversing
together, others dancing, singing, and
sporting after their manner, which
pleased them highly, and often made
us pastime . . . many of them sprightly
maidens, full of jollity and good
humour, afforded us abundance of
recreation; as did several little fine
boys, which we mostly kept to attend
on us about the ship.*

—Captain James Barbot, 1770





I am reminded of why I put myself through this, Combing through these documents, so evil in their banality,

I find powerful stories of resistance against impossible odds, like the tale of multiple revolts on the slave ship *Unity*.

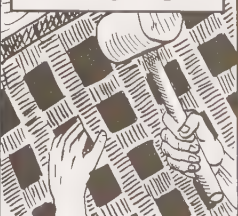


THE *UNITY*

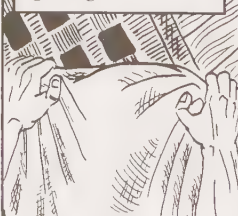
The Unity, September 23, 1769:
"Got everything else out of ye Womens room upon Deck, and cleaned it perfectly."



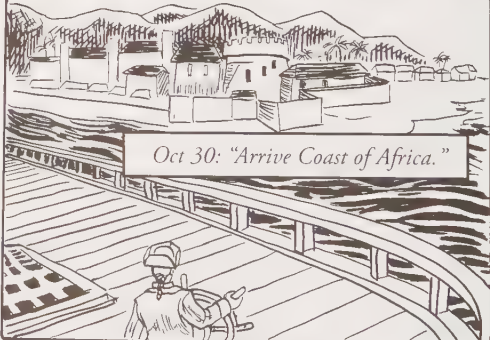
September 24:
"Carpenter sawing an awning over ye Womens's gratings."



September 28:
"Carpenter began to raise ye Womens's gratings."

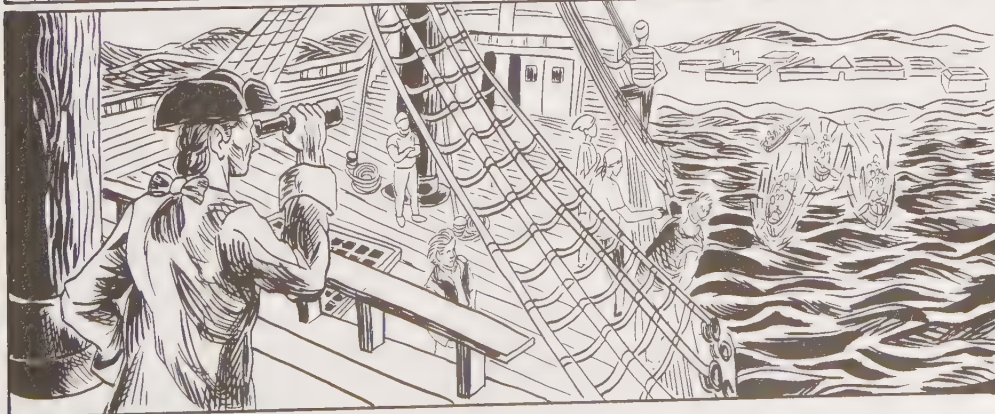


Oct 30: "Arrive Coast of Africa."



Nov 3: "Employed cleaning the Forecastle, making sails, fixing Netting around ye Head Rails, and several necessary jobs."



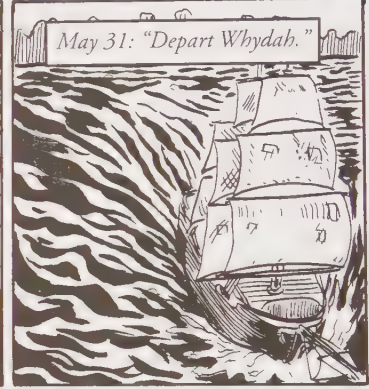




"Arrive, Whydah, May 19, 1770."



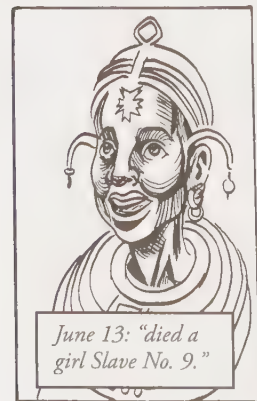
May 20: "got 200 slaves, 425 slaves on board."



May 31: "Depart Whydah."



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."



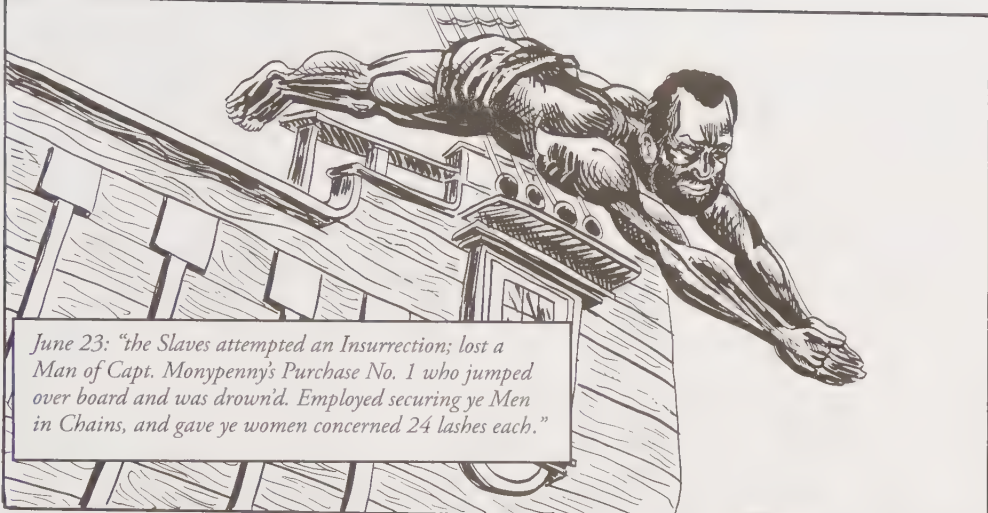
June 14: "died a Woman No. 10."



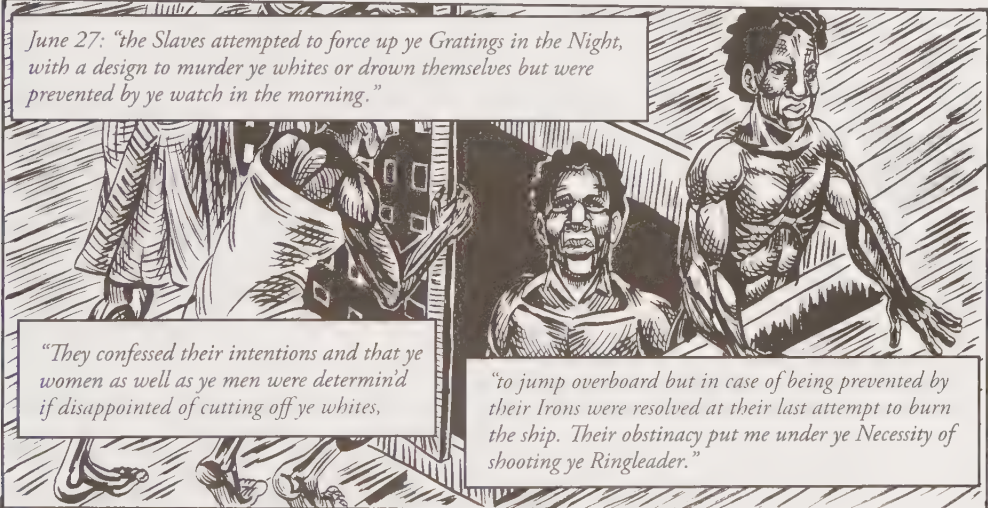
June 15: "died a Man Slave No. 11."



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



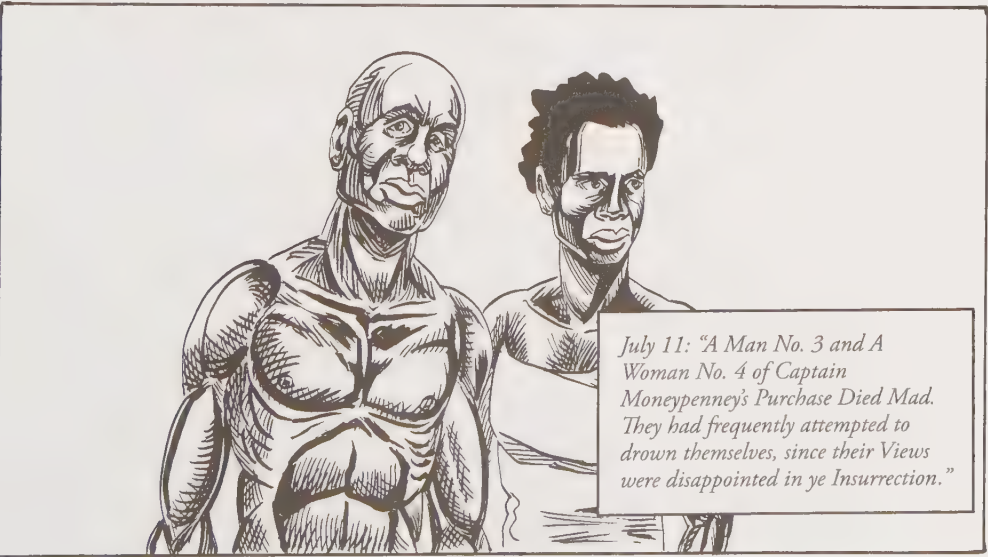
June 23: "the Slaves attempted an Insurrection; lost a Man of Capt. Monypenny's Purchase No. 1 who jumped over board and was drown'd. Employed securing ye Men in Chains, and gave ye women concerned 24 lashes each."



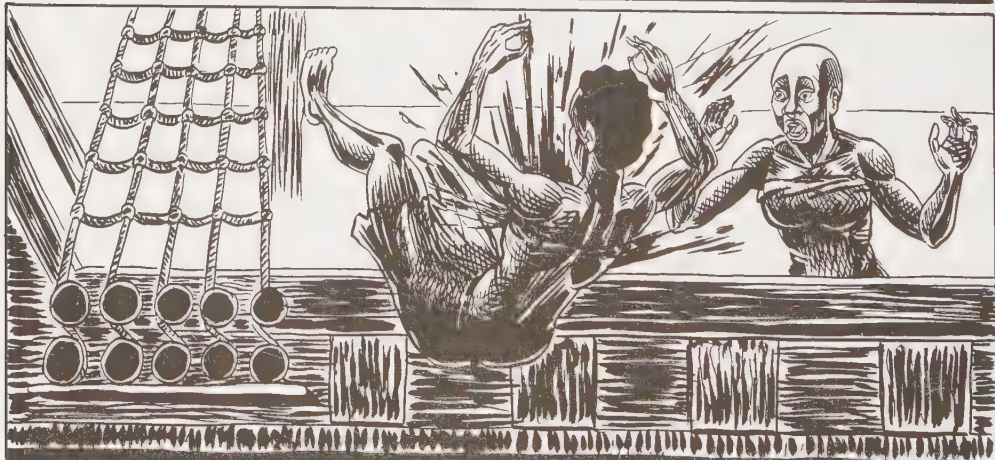
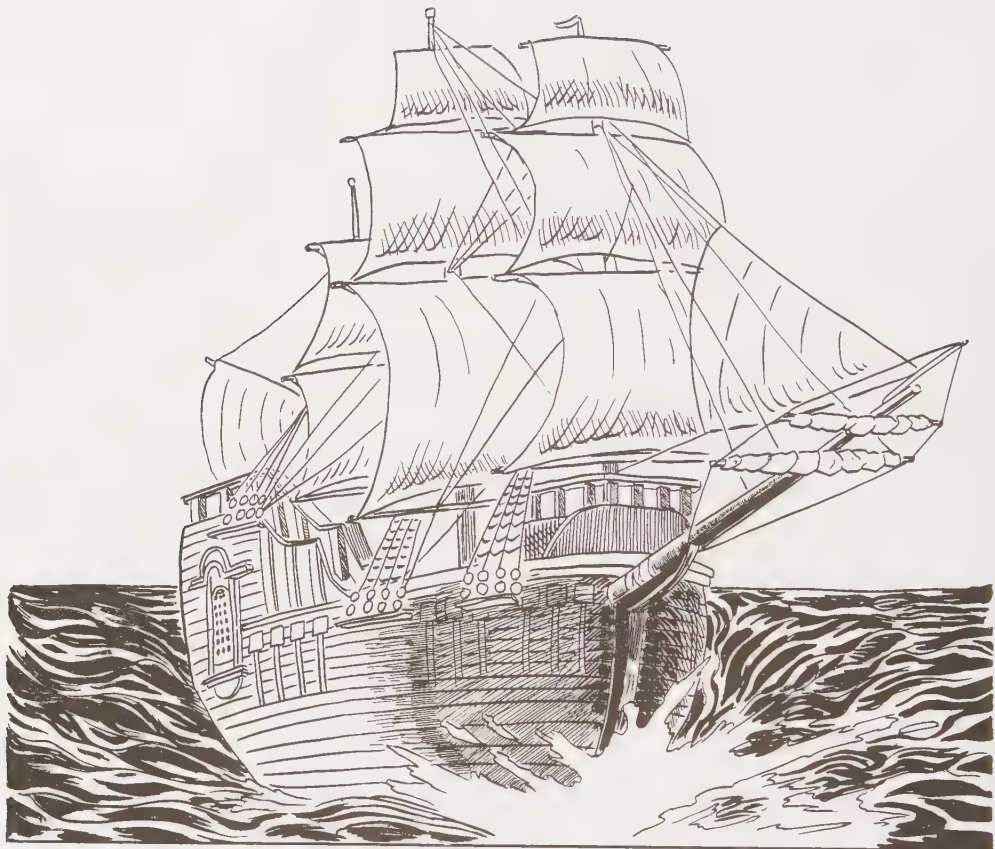
June 27: "the Slaves attempted to force up ye Gratings in the Night, with a design to murder ye whites or drown themselves but were prevented by ye watch in the morning."

"They confessed their intentions and that ye women as well as ye men were determin'd if disappointed of cutting off ye whites,

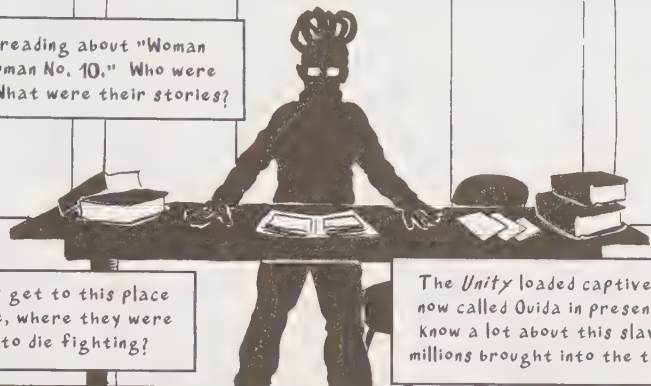
"to jump overboard but in case of being prevented by their Irons were resolv'd at their last attempt to burn the ship. Their obstinacy put me under ye Necessity of shooting ye Ringleader."



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



I am sick of reading about "Woman No. 4" or "Woman No. 10." Who were these women? What were their stories?



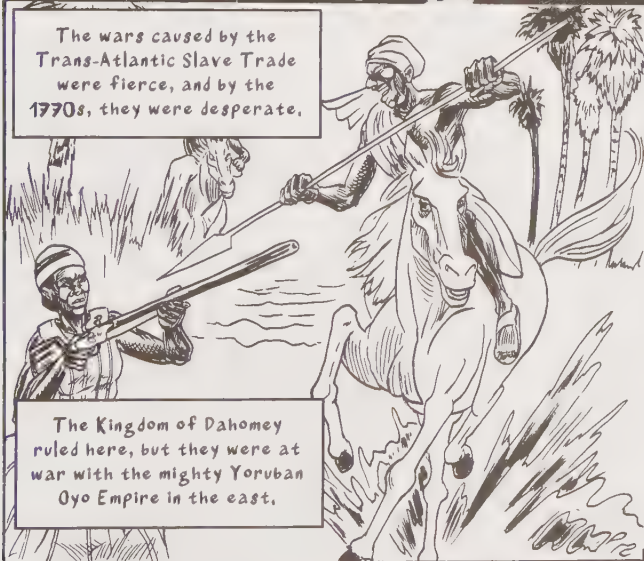
How did they get to this place and this time, where they were prepared to die fighting?

The *Unity* loaded captives from Whydah, now called Ouida in present-day Benin. 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 *Unity's* voyage.



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

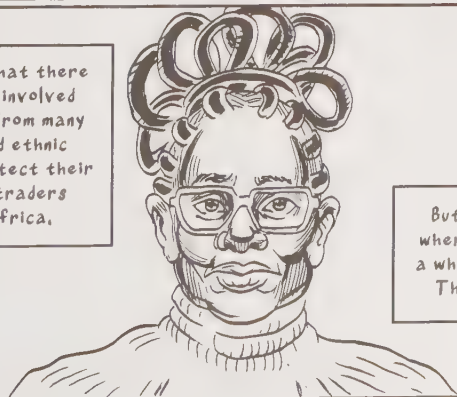


The Kingdom of Dahomey ruled here, but they were at war with the mighty Yoruban Oyo Empire in the east.



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

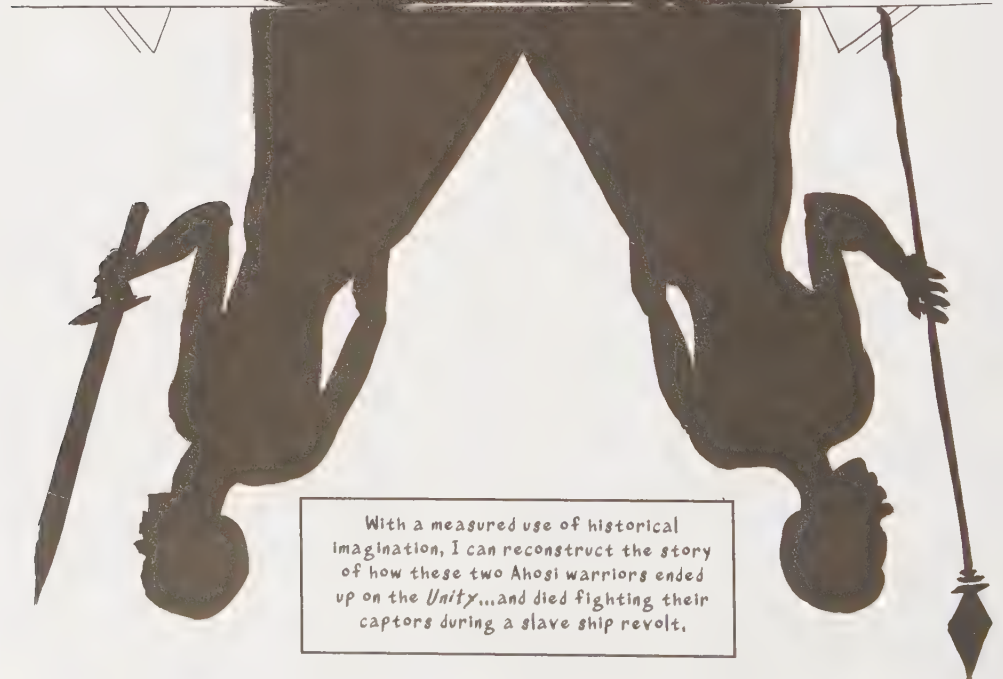
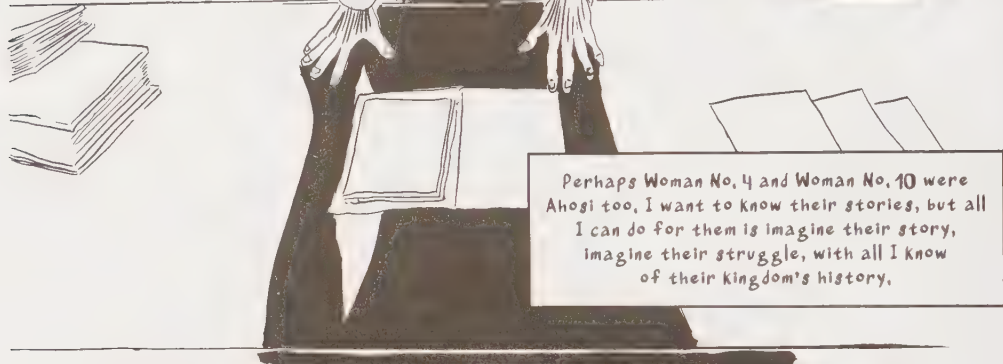
Documentation shows that there were women warriors involved in these wars, women from many different nations and ethnic groups fighting to protect their villages from slave traders throughout West Africa.



But the kingdom of Dahomey, where Whydah was located, had a whole army of women soldiers. They were called the Ahoi.



Perhaps Woman No. 4 and Woman No. 10 were Ahosi too. I want to know their stories, but all I can do for them is imagine their story, imagine their struggle, with all I know of their kingdom's history,



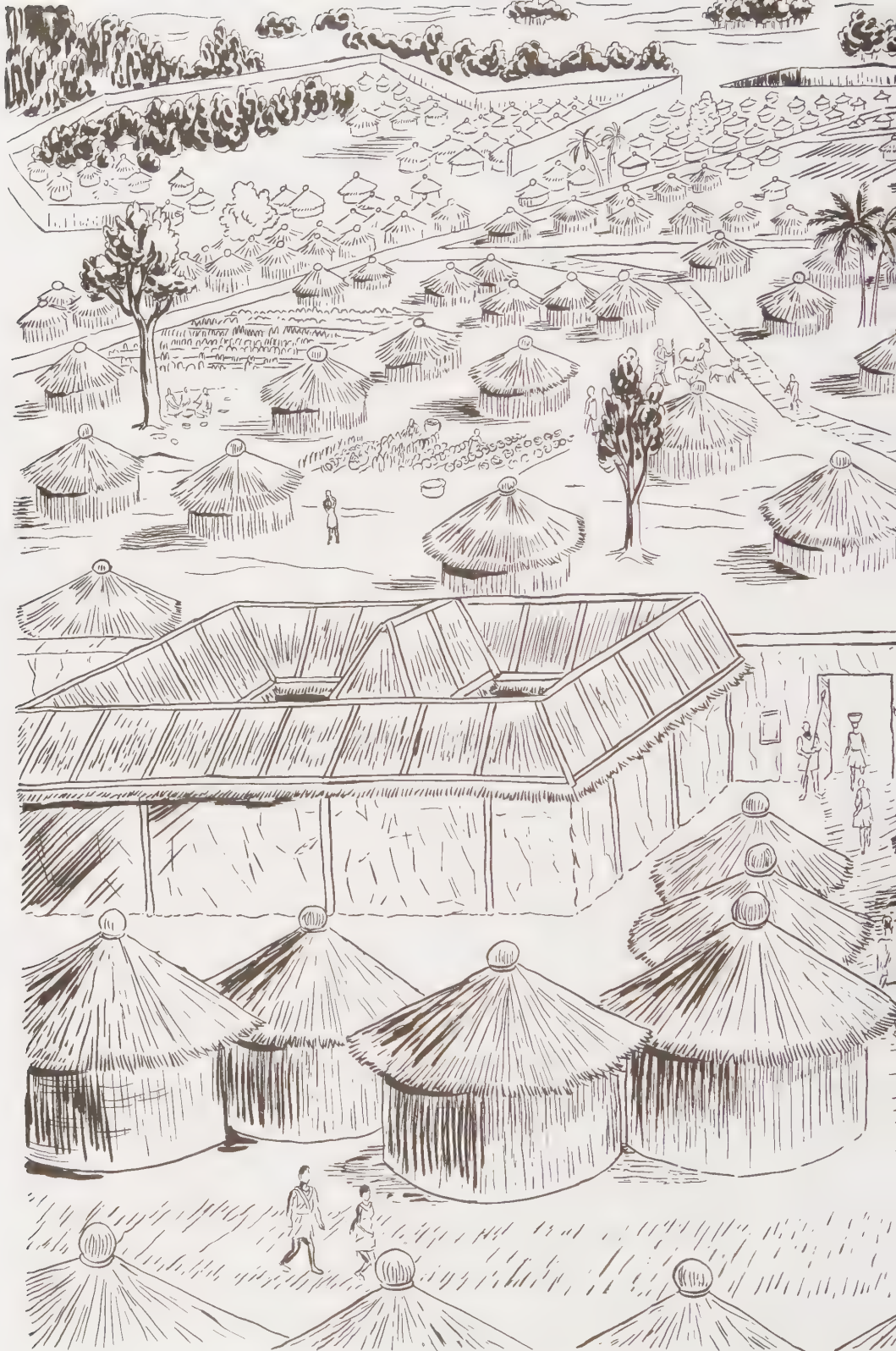
With a measured use of historical imagination, I can reconstruct the story of how these two Ahosi warriors ended up on the *Unity*...and died fighting their captors during a slave ship revolt.

Chapter 9

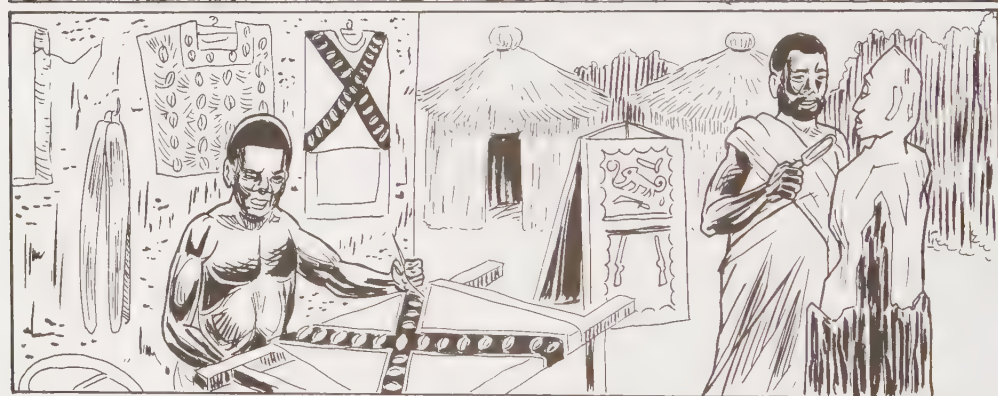
All Water Has a Perfect Memory

THE KINGDOM OF DAHOMEY, 1769



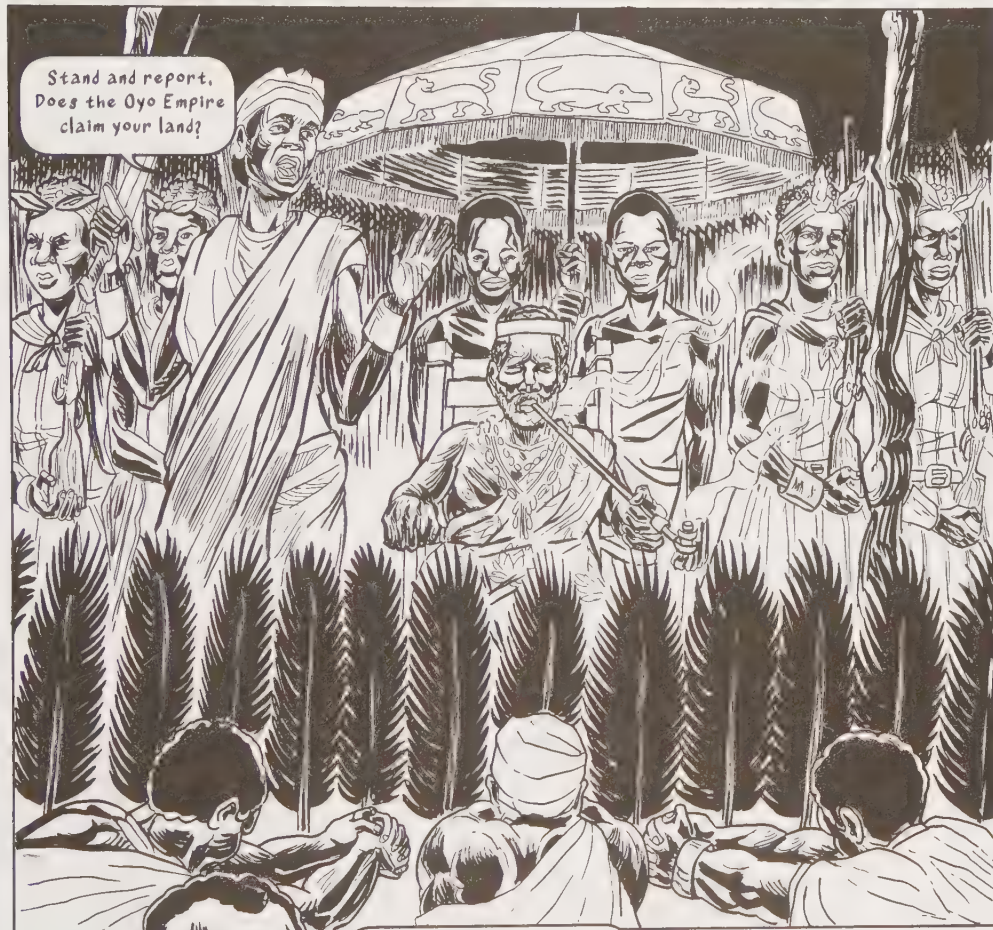




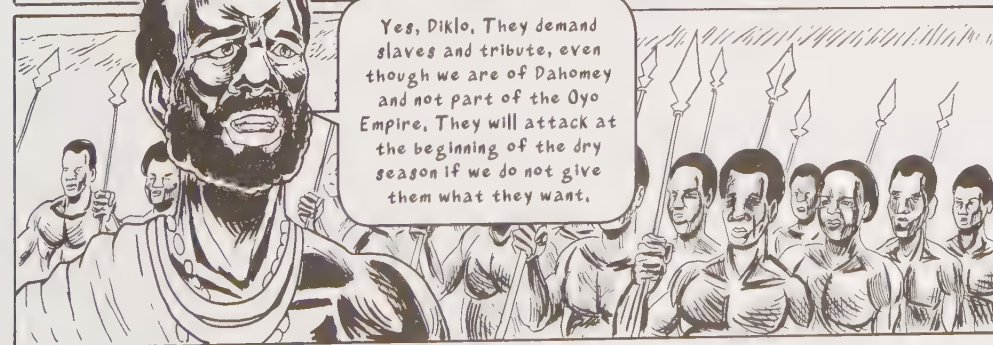


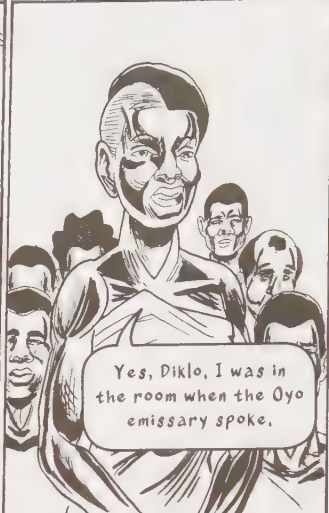


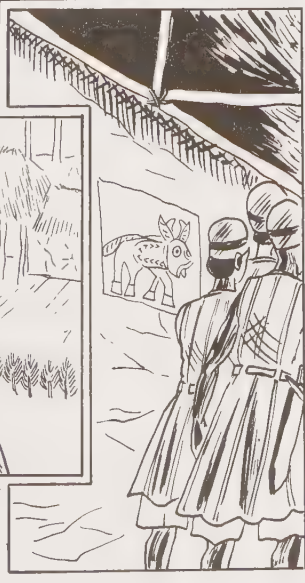
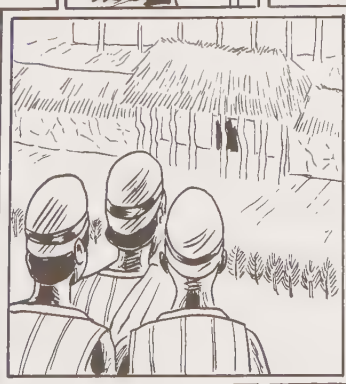
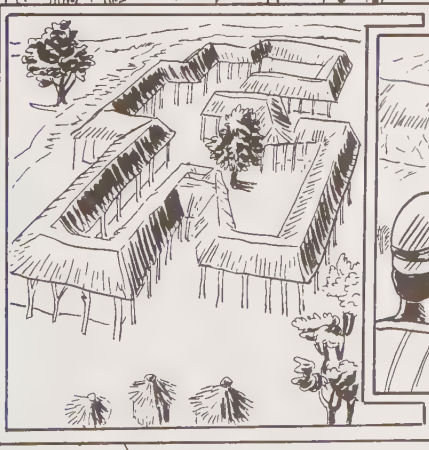
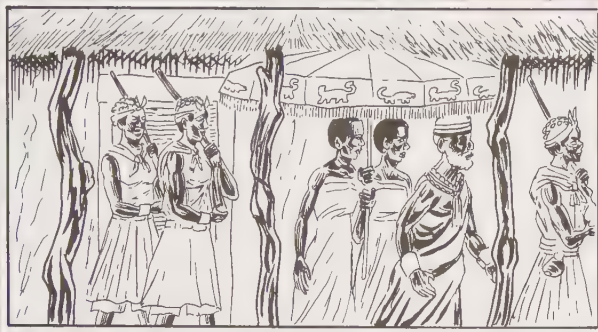
Stand and report,
Does the Oyo Empire
claim your land?

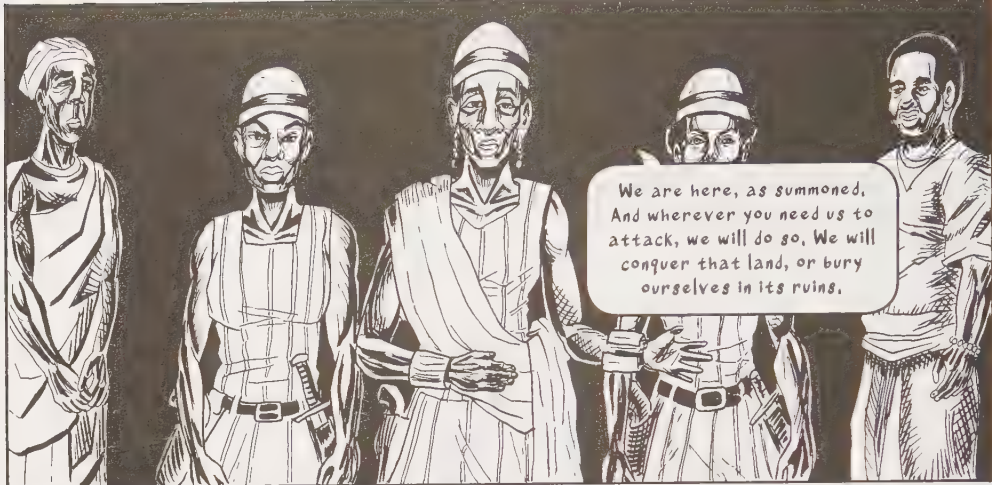


Yes, Diklo. They demand
slaves and tribute, even
though we are of Dahomey
and not part of the Oyo
Empire. They will attack at
the beginning of the dry
season if we do not give
them what they want.

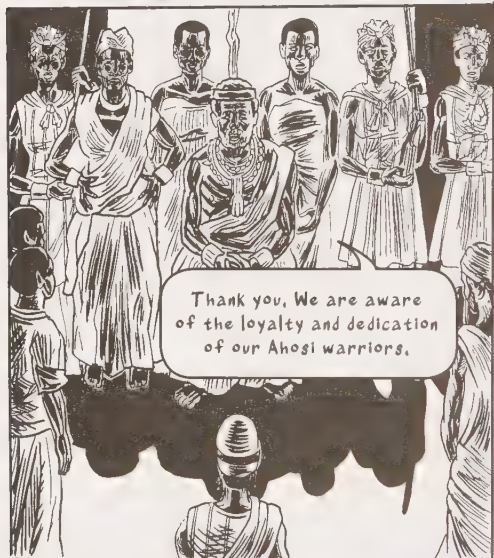








We are here, as summoned. And wherever you need us to attack, we will do so. We will conquer that land, or bury ourselves in its ruins.



Thank you. We are aware of the loyalty and dedication of our Ahosi warriors.



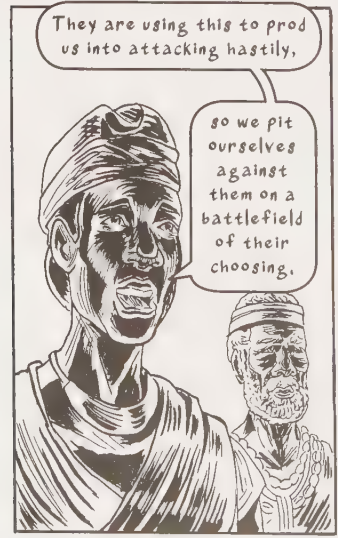
But the question is, do we go to war again against the Oyo Empire and their vicious, ground-eating cavalry?

Or not?



It is certain that threatening a Dahomey prince,

his lands and lineage, would anger the Great Leopard. Oyo knows this.



They are using this to prod us into attacking hastily,

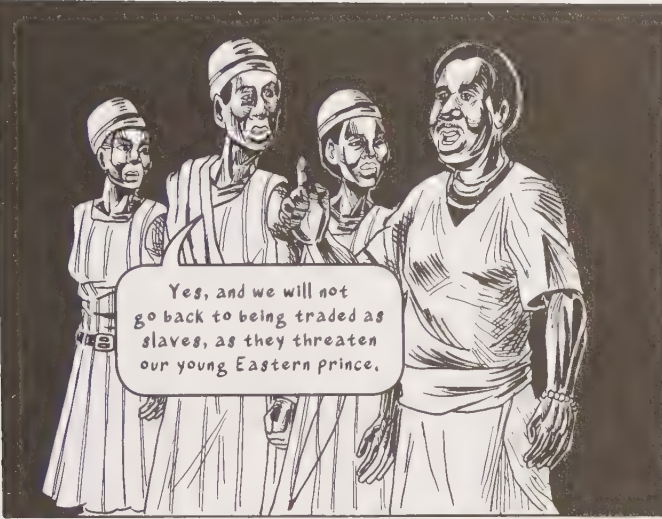
so we pit ourselves against them on a battlefield of their choosing.



But we are strong now.



We trade for flintlocks directly with the English.



Yes, and we will not go back to being traded as slaves, as they threaten our young Eastern prince.



We cannot go back to being the fodder that fills the coffers of the Oyo Empire with cowries and guns!



I agree, We must stop Oyo now on this battlefield.



Before their spears are here, at our heart.

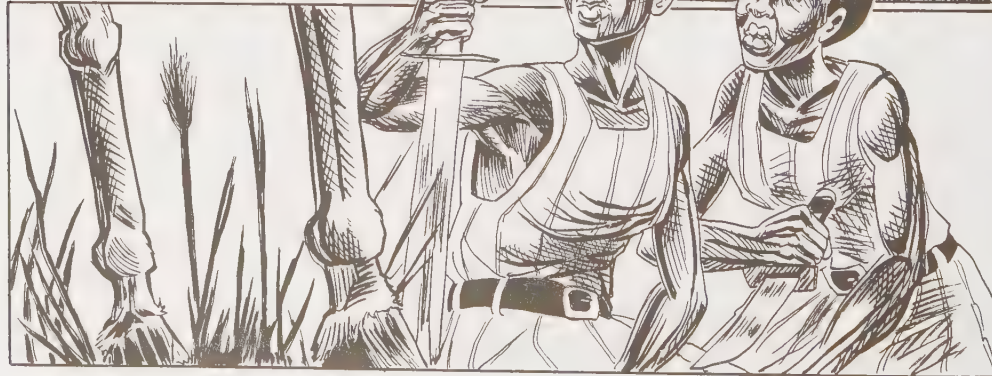




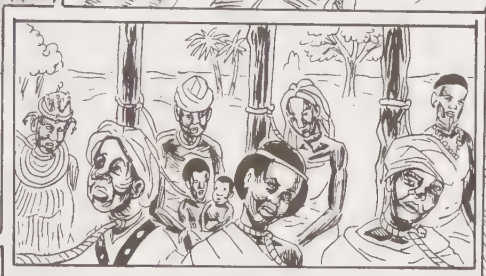


To war! For the
Leopard! For victory!



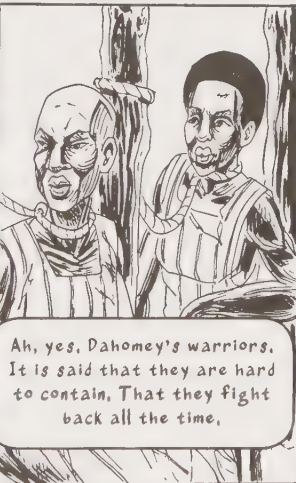


SLAVE MARKET, ON THE CONTESTED BORDER
BETWEEN DAHOMEY AND THE OYO EMPIRE.



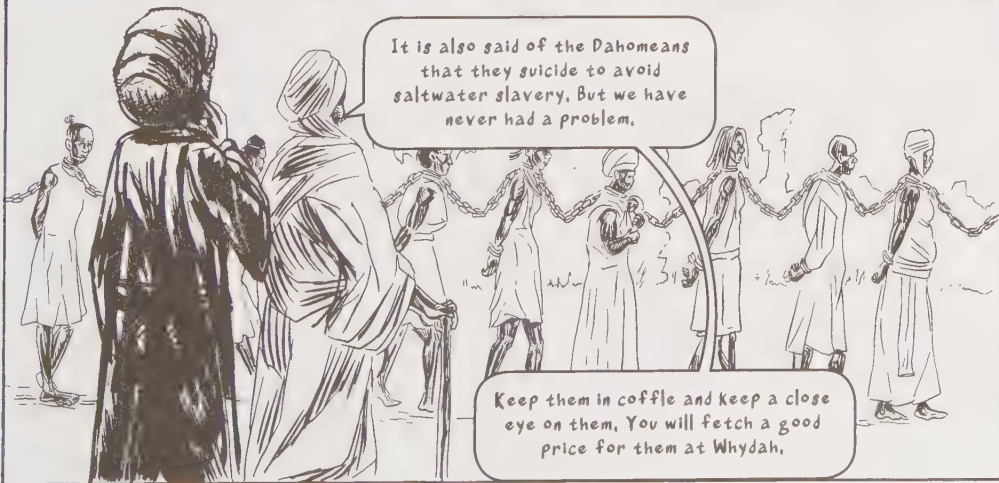
I need them strong, healthy, and
young. This is what the English
want for their tall ships.

If you want strong, look at
these war captives I have.

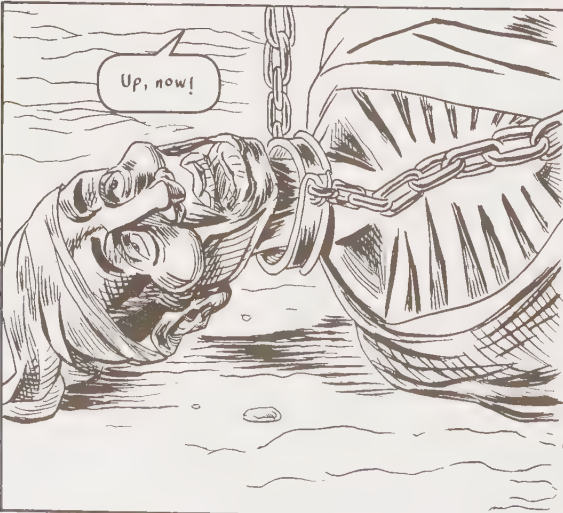


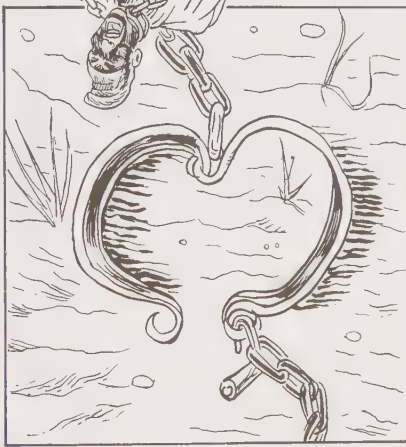
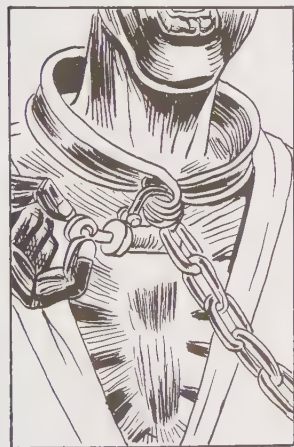
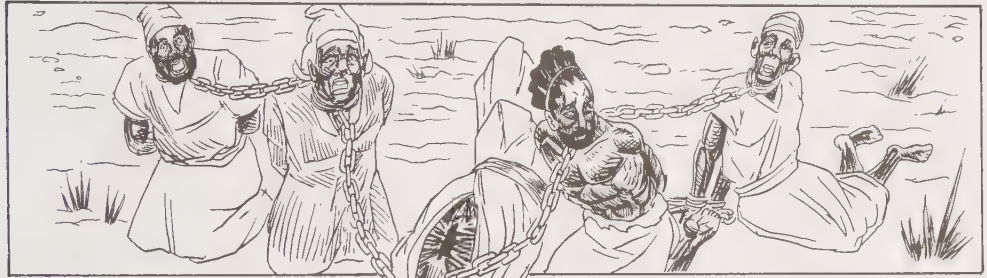
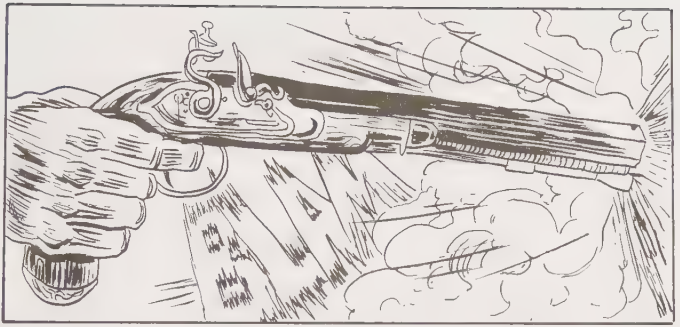
Ah, yes, Dahomey's warriors.
It is said that they are hard
to contain, That they fight
back all the time.

It is also said of the Dahomeans
that they suicide to avoid
saltwater slavery. But we have
never had a problem.



Keep them in coffle and keep a close
eye on them, You will fetch a good
price for them at Whydah.

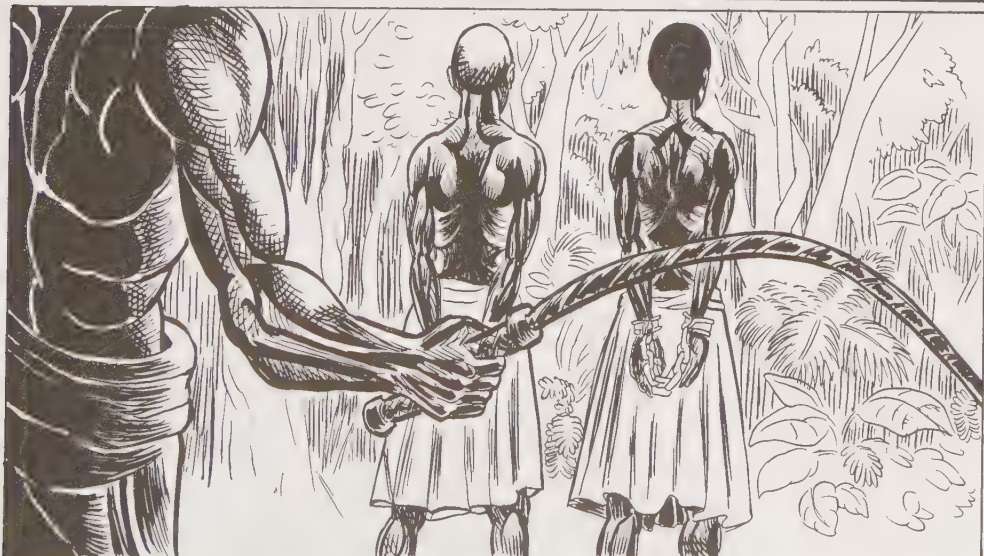
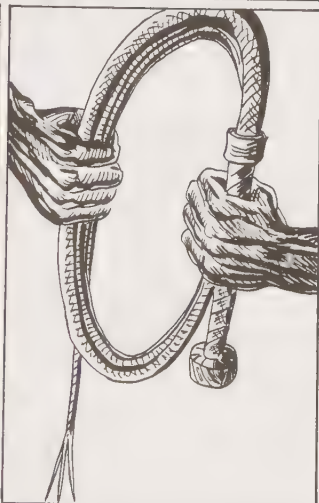






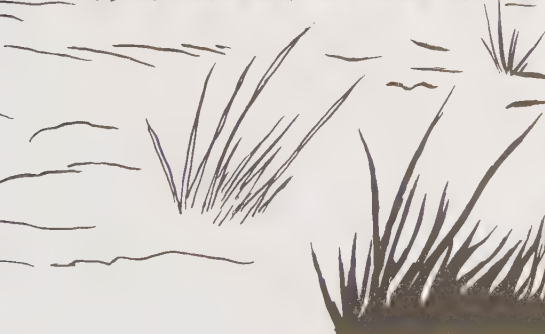


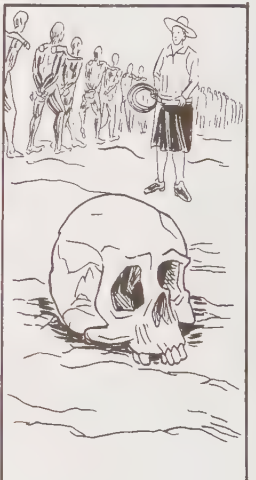
No! These ones are too valuable. Whip them only!

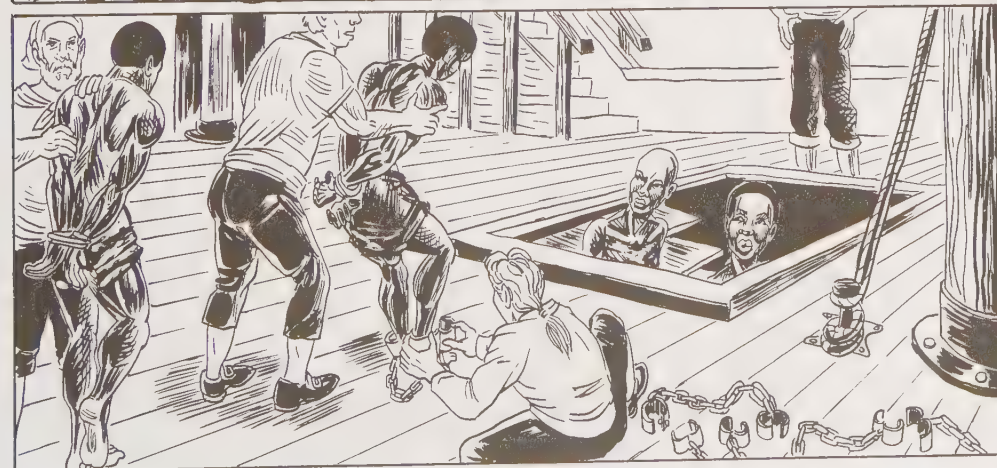




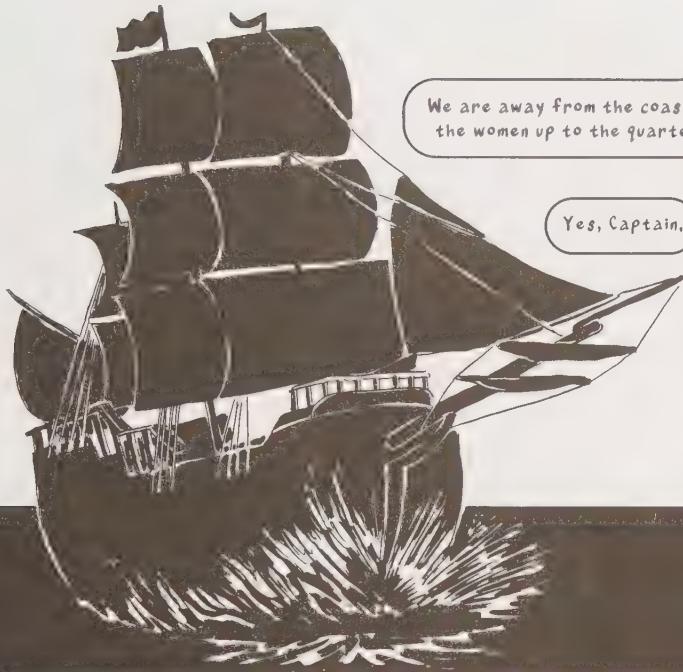
WHYDAH SLAVE TRADING PORT





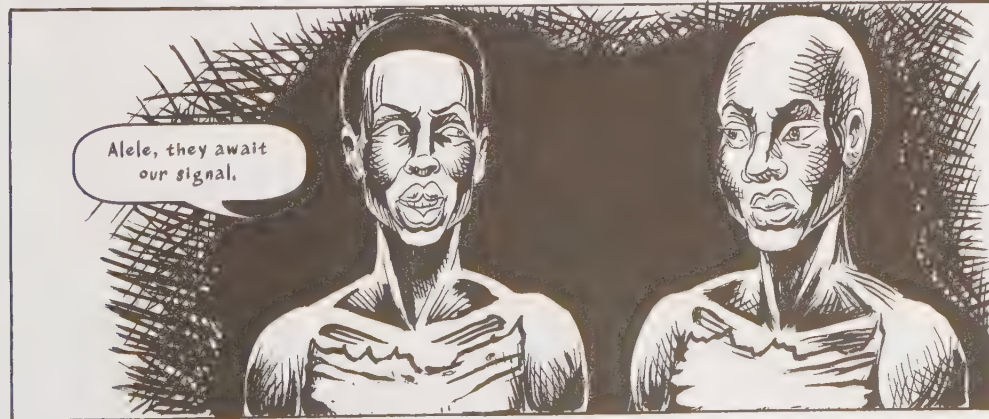






We are away from the coast. Bring the women up to the quarterdeck!

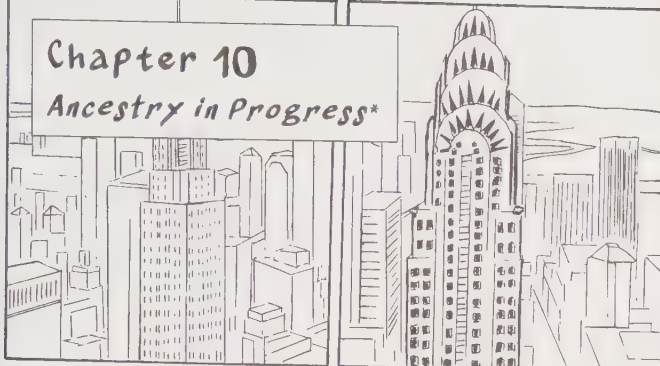
Yes, Captain.



Alele, they await our signal.

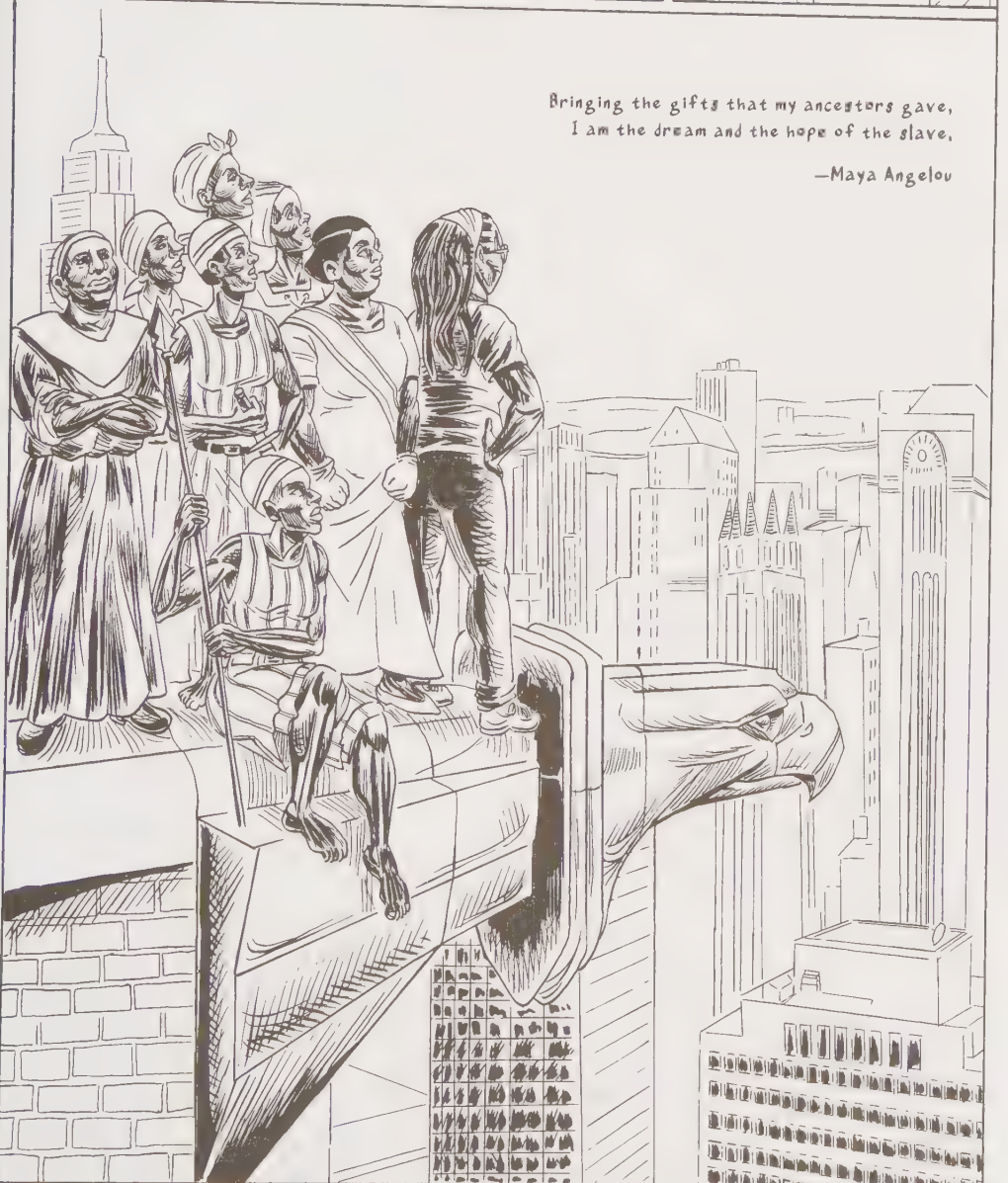
Chapter 10

*Ancestry in Progress**



Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

—Maya Angelou



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

We are haunted.

Haunted by slavery and its legacy.

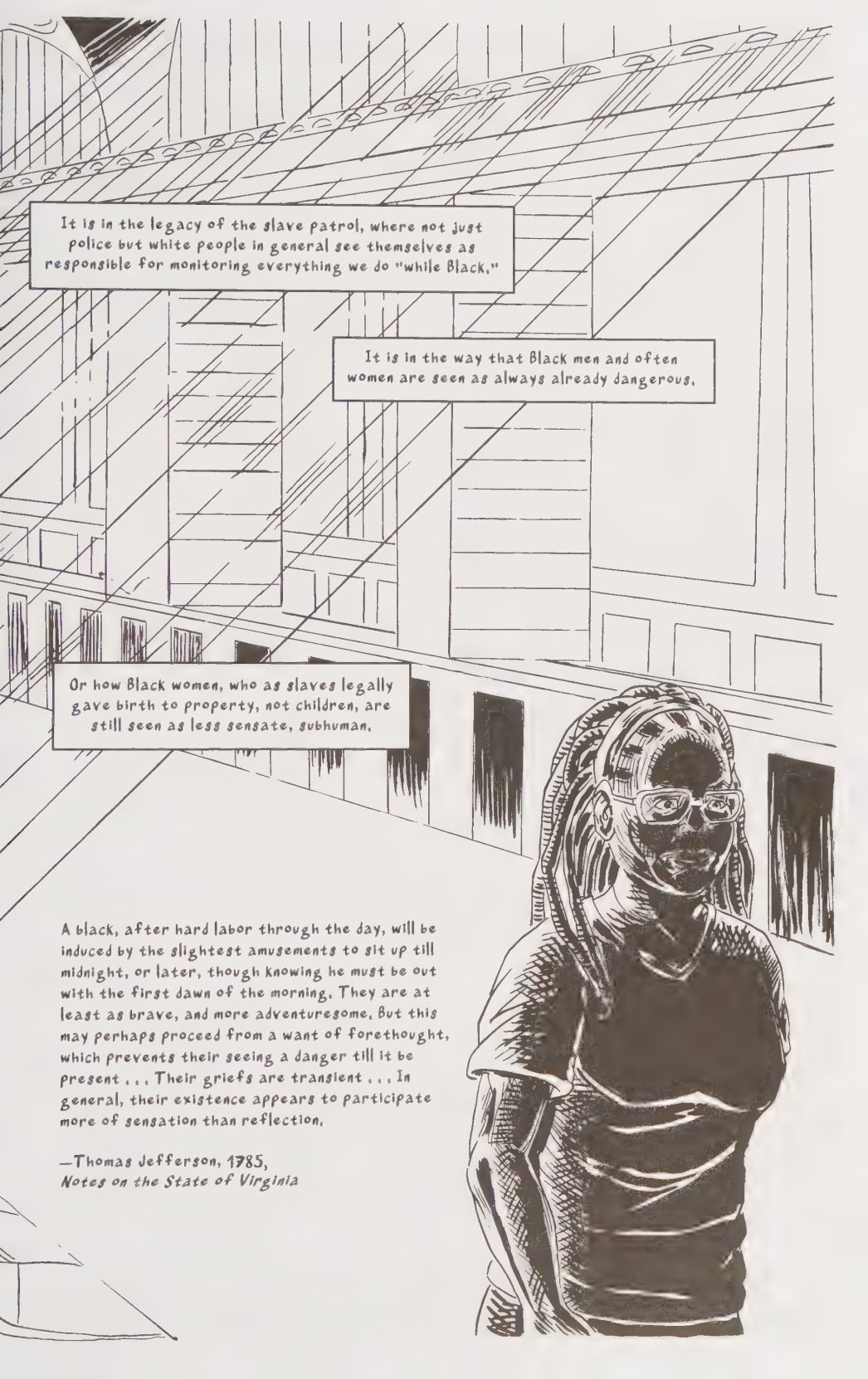
Our country lives in the afterlife of slavery.

WHITES ONLY WITHIN CITY LIMITS AFTER DARK



TULSA DRY GOODS





It is in the legacy of the slave patrol, where not just police but white people in general see themselves as responsible for monitoring everything we do "while Black,"

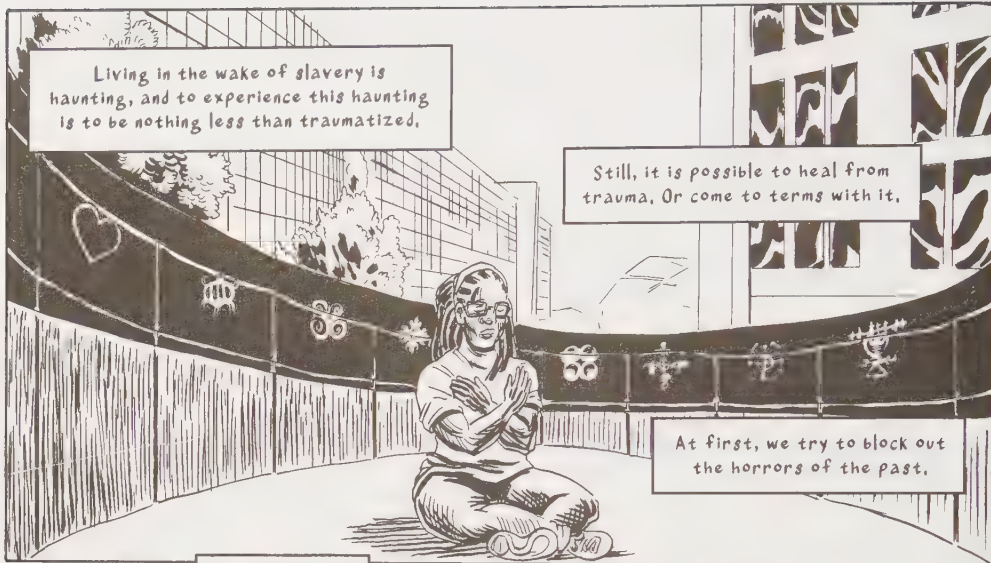
It is in the way that Black men and often women are seen as always already dangerous,

Or how Black women, who as slaves legally gave birth to property, not children, are still seen as less sensate, subhuman,

A black, after hard labor through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning. They are at least as brave, and more adventuresome. But this may perhaps proceed from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present . . . Their griefs are transient . . . In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection,

—Thomas Jefferson, 1785,
Notes on the State of Virginia





Living in the wake of slavery is haunting, and to experience this haunting is to be nothing less than traumatized.


Still, it is possible to heal from trauma, Or come to terms with it,

At first, we try to block out the horrors of the past.

To ignore them,



To pretend they are not there.



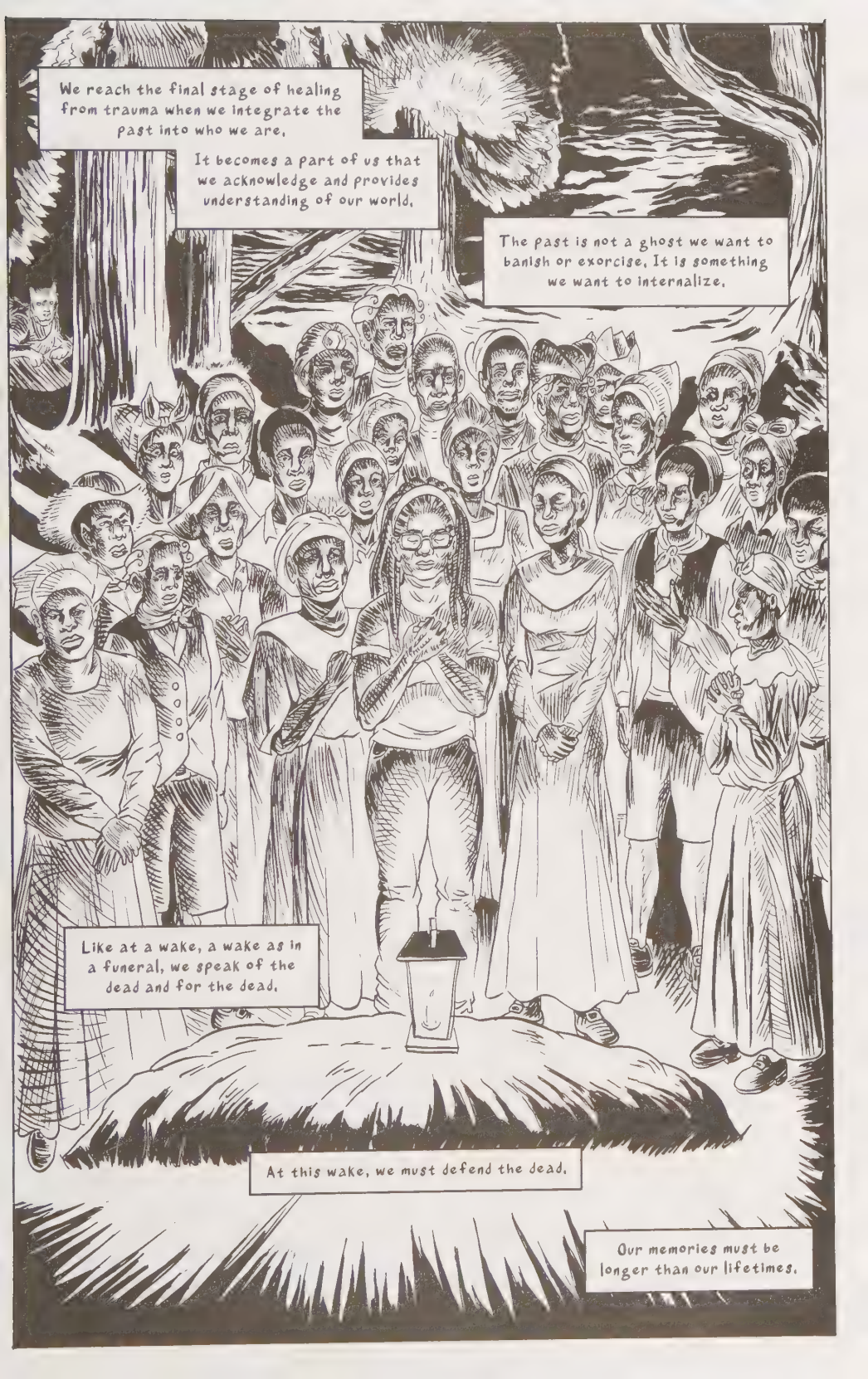
The next step is to acknowledge the past and its harm, even as it triggers us.

We try to avoid looking at it too closely.



But the ghosts are everywhere.

They have been waiting for us all along.



We reach the final stage of healing
from trauma when we integrate the
past into who we are.

It becomes a part of us that
we acknowledge and provides
understanding of our world.

The past is not a ghost we want to
banish or exorcise. It is something
we want to internalize.

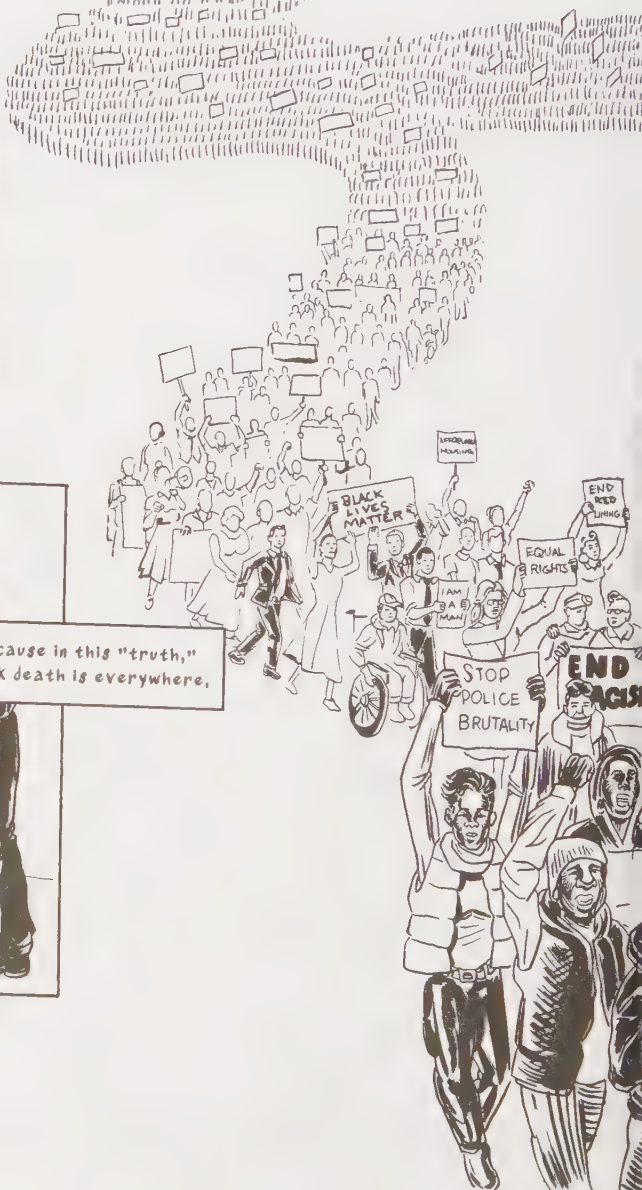
Like at a wake, a wake as in
a funeral, we speak of the
dead and for the dead.

At this wake, we must defend the dead.

Our memories must be
longer than our lifetimes.

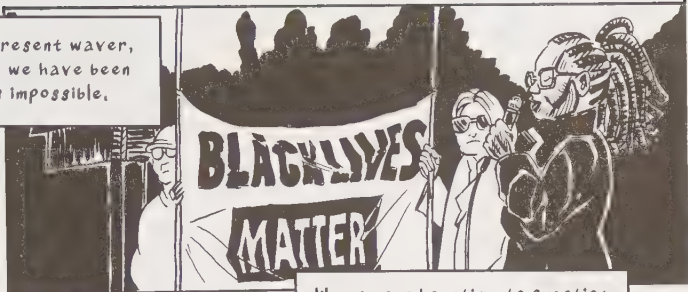
It is said that haunting
makes the present waver.

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



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

We need to see the present waver,
because the present we have been
given to inhabit is impossible.



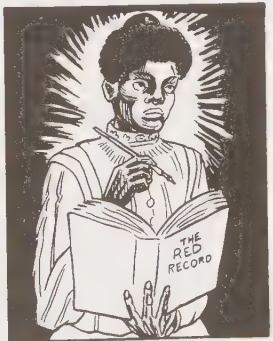
We use our haunting to question
what is affirmed as the truth
of our existence.



THE NEGRO MOTORIST GREEN-BOOK

- Hotels
- Dineros
- Garages
- Flyght Clubs
- Restaurants
- Service Stations
- Automobiles
- Quaint Houses
- Local - Negro
- Barber - Shops
- Beauty - Parlors

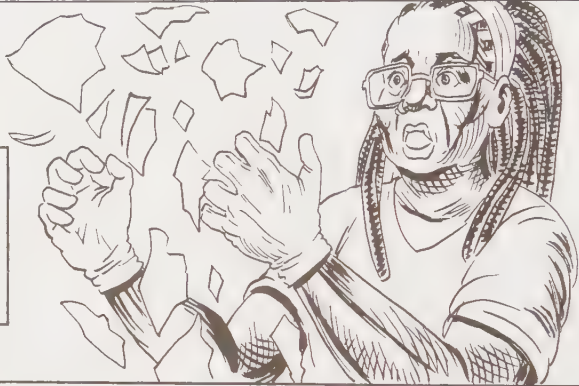
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We must use our haunting to see how Black life truly is and see how it could be otherwise.



We must live in an alternative Black temporality where we reach into the past to "reimagine a future otherwise."



The story we are given of being Black in America is that we have no past, and we have no say in the future, the future that doesn't contain us.



But it must.



They say that the traumas 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,"

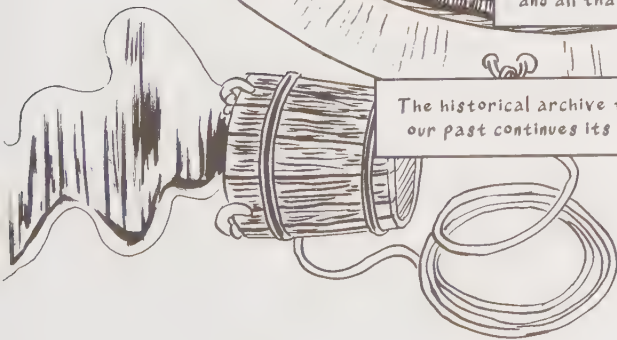
But we have.



Four hundred years of slavery and all that it has wrought.

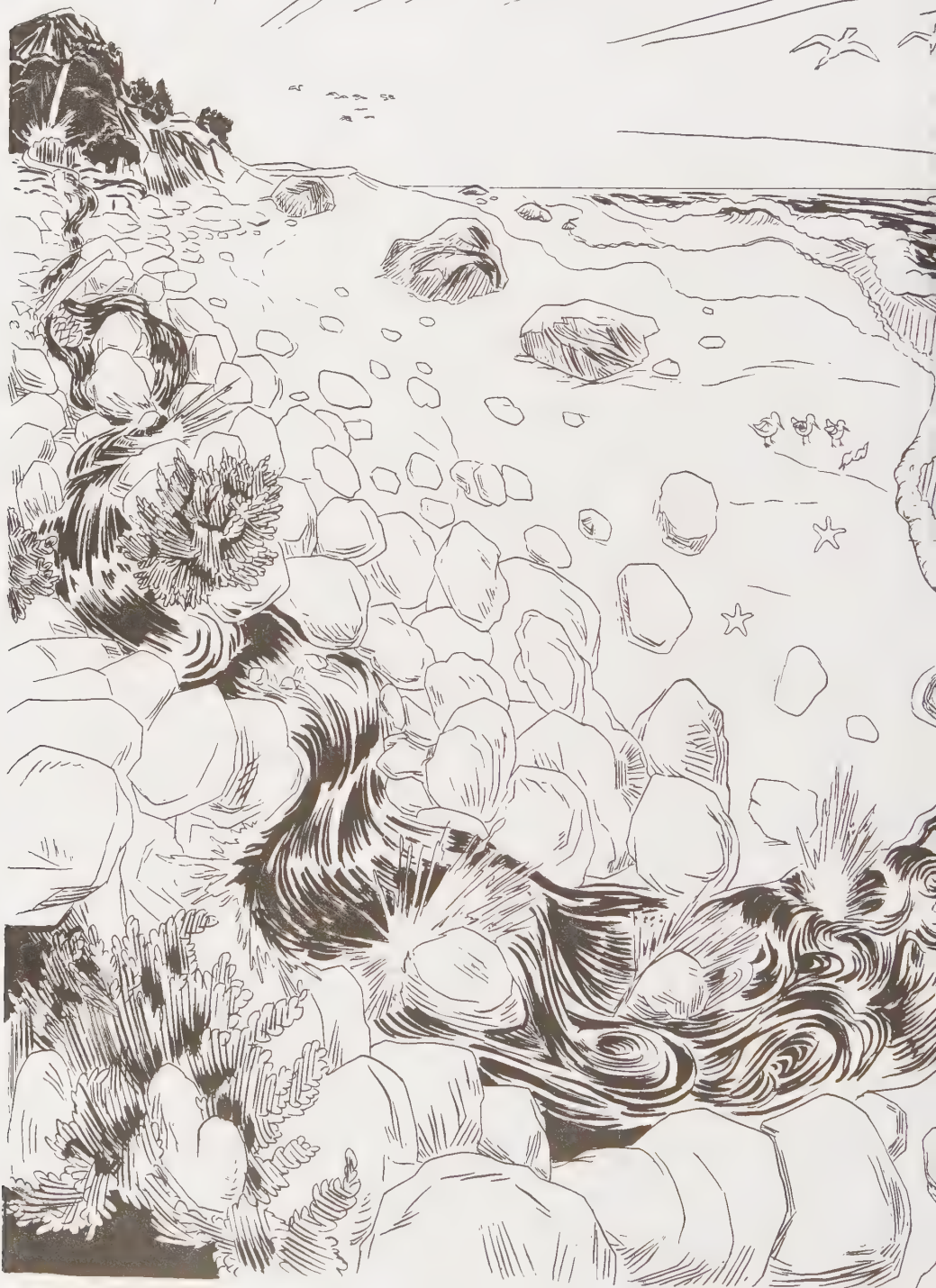
The historical archive that violently erased our past continues its violence against us.

This also shapes what we believe is even possible for us in the future.



When we go back and retrieve our past,

our legacy of resistance through impossible odds,



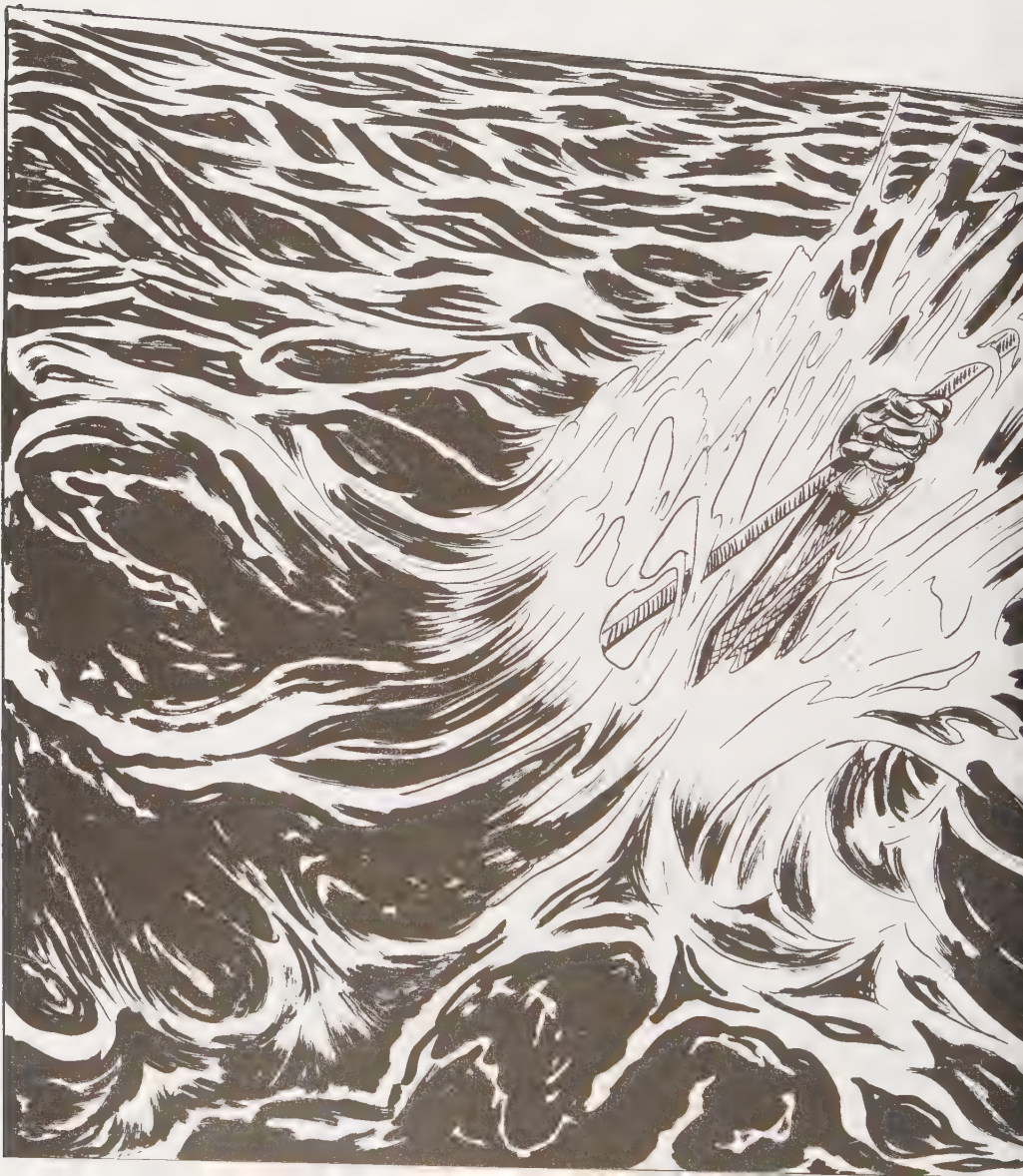
our way out of no way,

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 superpower.









For the Future!

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.

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trying to shift from an academic writer to a visual writer. And special thanks to Sarah Beth Hufbauer, 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.

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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 Snead. Michael Lapinski, Sally Richardson, Kalli Padget, Erika Witt, Jonah Quinn, and Fernando Lopez.

—Hugo Martínez

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"We are lucky to be in Rebecca Hall's wake as we look toward the future with fresh eyes from visualizing a deeper relationship to the revolutionary Black feminist spirit that brought us here."

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"Wake brought me to tears, recognition, fury, gratitude, solidarity. In both pain and joy in struggle, Hall gives her readers 'ancestry in progress.' Consequences flow from living in the wake, admitting the haunting power of histories."

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"Wake celebrates the brave enslaved Black women who fought and died for their freedom with dignity."

—JOEL CHRISTIAN GILL, author of *Strange Fruit*



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REBECCA HALL is a scholar, activist, and educator. She is a graduate of Swarthmore College and Berkeley Law, and received her PhD in history with a minor in feminist studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is currently a scholar-in-residence at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. She is the granddaughter of slaves.



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HUGO MARTÍNEZ is an independent comic artist focused on depicting narratives of struggle, identity, and resilience. He is based in New Orleans.

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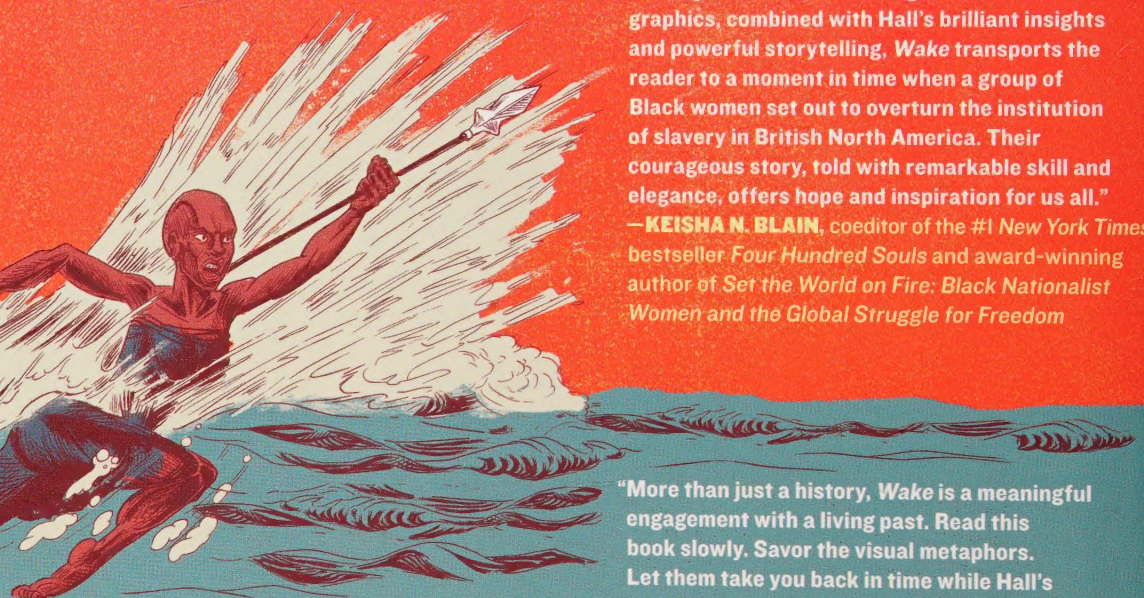
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"More than just a history, *Wake* is a meaningful engagement with a living past. Read this book slowly. Savor the visual metaphors. Let them take you back in time while Hall's narration pins you to the uncomfortable present. This book will haunt you the way that the legacies of slavery haunt this country."

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"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*

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