

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Dr. Carrie Gibson, who studies the history of the Caribbean and is the author of two books, *Empire's Crossroads: A History of the Caribbean from Columbus to the Present Day* and *El Norte: The Epic and Forgotten Story of Hispanic North America*. Regular listeners may recall that Carrie and I have previously discussed the stories of enslaved women, who told those stories and what biases they brought to the tellings. This time we wanted to focus specifically on the women involved in slave revolts in the Caribbean. Who were they? What do we know about them? Why don't we know more? And as always, what are the biases that shaped the way their stories are or are not told? So first, could we start with a bit of context around the slave revolts that we'll be discussing?

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CG: So the book that I'm writing, *Freedom's Fighters*, is a history of the 400-year struggle against slavery in many of its forms and slave revolts are just one of those threads, there's many threads. And some of the revolts are very well-known like the Haitian Revolution. But there's a lot of other ones that are perhaps known to you, if you're from or familiar with places. So I'm thinking of like the Baptist revolt in Jamaica in 1831, or Bussa's revolt in Barbados in 1816, or Stono in South Carolina in 1739. So I'm trying to put all these together along with various other things. And one of the things I realized is that there's almost no women in the revolts until the 1700s. And I as I'm going through the manuscript, sort of had to look up and go, "well, wait a minute, what exactly is going on here?" Now, this is partially because the first part of the book focuses very much on the Spanish empire, because the other European powers show up later. And within the Spanish system, it's not that there weren't revolts, but there were also other mechanisms to obtain freedom, like *coartación*, which is buying yourself out of freedom. There were petitions that you could make against unfair treatment, there were petitions that you could make if you were supposed to be freed upon an enslaver's death and the family didn't. There were mechanisms of redress, basically, and a lot of women were involved in those. And so I'm thinking about the work of people like Chloe Ireton, who have gone in and looked at a lot of these cases in depth, and a lot of them tend to involve women. And this is the 1500s, 1600s. But as we get to the 1700s, I think we see women appearing in the record a bit more. But again, it's very much in the shadows. And when we think of a slave revolt, I think the image that comes to mind is always sort of a central male figure, even in the 1600s. Zumbi Palmares in Brazil, obviously in the US, Nat Turner. So we're thinking of these male figures, but you scratch around the surface a little bit, and there are women, but there's just so many structural problems, and we can talk about this as we go and trying to dig out their stories.

And I should probably use this moment to hat tip Rebecca Hall's *Wake*, because this is a really great book that is very, very, very accessible, because it's a nonfiction book in a graphic form. So not a graphic novel, but it reads like one. And what's great about this is, this is her quest is trying to figure out in certain moments, starting with the revolt in New York, but also looking at slave ships later on, where are the women and how do we recover their voices? And what's really useful about this book is that she also in tandem tells her own story as a historian of trying to find these things. And I think for anyone who is interested in possibly pursuing PhDs or masters or a book project around these sorts of questions, that's a really good starting point because you get to see what you're up against, basically. And the fact that not only can the institutions themselves and the archives be quite impenetrable and actively hostile, especially the things around slavery, although that is hopefully changing. I know in her book, she had to wrestle with quite a lot of archives. And I think though now in Britain in the last few years, there have been attempts to be more transparent, open with documentation relating to issues around slavery and also, of companies and firms that were connected to slavery. So the Lloyds register, the insurance industry, some of them have private archives as well. And I think now they're being a little more transparent or at least giving some access. And again, that's one way to go through it. But in thinking about all of this and in thinking about this whole problem, what came to mind was this phrase "unthinkable." And actually, that's usually said in relation to the Haitian Revolution. And here I'm riffing off a very famous book called *Silencing the Past* by Michel-Rolph Trouillot. And in it, he talks about how the Haitian Revolution as a slave revolt and a successful one was unthinkable as it happened. And I just feel like the

participation of women is related to that. It's like, yes, they were there, but it was almost so unthinkable that **they** would necessarily be the leaders, that they are kind of sidelined. So, there's a lot going on in my brain and in this book, and possibly in a future project about this.

AT: So when we're looking at who tells the histories, right, because as we discussed last time, getting any information about people who were enslaved largely comes from their enslavers. And so they're not necessarily looking to tell someone's full story. And a lot of these folks, we're lucky if we even have a name. And so when we're looking at those biases of who is providing the only documentation that you have to work with, to what extent do you think it was also this, the sexism and the racism and particularly how they combined because there was very much this idea that, Black people weren't intelligent, for example, and like, "oh no, they couldn't possibly, create a military strategy that would effectively topple our regime." And so you've got that racism, but they've also got the sexism. And so, how do you think that was impacting the way they were telling these stories?

CG: I think both of those were hugely important and influential. Because what we really have in most of the cases is colonial records and it really varies across colonizing regimes, as to how much details given. Usually I found, and obviously I've not done a forensic examination of every mention of a woman in a slave revolt. If somebody would like to do that as a PhD, I can suggest a few supervisors for you, because I think that would be an amazing project. But a really, really difficult one. But usually women's names, I found are named partly almost out of the fact that there's few of them. Sometimes you would see something about a small revolt being repressed and it would be like, "oh, and 20 more people were hanged." And sometimes there'd be a list of names and sometimes there wouldn't be. But usually if there's a woman, because there weren't often women, I think, a name would show up. But again, I can't speak to any consistency in it, if that makes sense. I feel like as we get into the 19th century, certainly the late 18th century, the records become better, more detailed, but trying to sort of figure things out from earlier times. Again, and a lot of that's heavily Spanish. Again, I'm not great on the Dutch archives. But just speaking generally across everything I've done through this period, women tended to be named, but with almost no details. And so unless they were, and we'll go into some more specific cases where they do get named, and it's almost a bit of a confusion, right? It's almost a bit of, what are they doing here? Or they were involved in ways that included spreading information or relaying things between people versus "this was the ringleader and thus she needs to die." That is very, very rare. And obviously, and we spoke about Nanny last time, and we'll speak about Nanny again, because she's one of the few women that is identified as a military leader. And she gets the respect in some ways of the British and she gets the land that she wants at the end as well, which is in itself quite an interesting story. She is not in the gallows. But certainly, I think the role of women and the role of Black women and the assumed place of them is important in understanding this, at this place in time, and what they were expected to be part of.

Another thing that's going on as well is that you have, and this elates to the emerging categories of race, because we absolutely have the gender categories, right? There's an idea of men's roles and women's roles that are far more rigid than they are today. But race is still an emerging category and very early on, it becomes clear that Blackness is equated to slavery. But there are subsets within these categorizations. And one of them is the idea of the African versus the idea of the Creole. And so somebody who is a Creole enslaved person means they were born in that island, they were born in Barbados, they were born in the United States, they were born locally. And then you have Africans, who the Spaniards called bozales, and you see that word a lot in the literature. And there's been a lot of historical work on Africans, especially revolts that involve people who were still directly linked to Africa, who might have very well been enslaved after a conflict somewhere along the West African coast, and thus were the losers, and, were sent off in a slave ship.

So actually, what's going on, in many ways, is continuations of warfare, in some senses. And for instance, a case of that would be the island of St. John had a big slave revolt in 1733. And some of the scholarship and thinking around that is how it was a continuation, almost, of unrest that was going on in the Danish slave

factories, the slave forts. Denmark had a few slave forts on the West African coast, and they were the colonial power that controlled St. John's at the time. And so, St. John's, I should say, is part of the US Virgin Islands today, for not everyone who's familiar with every island of the Caribbean. And so what's been argued in this case is, that this was almost like this continuation, like this warfare spans the Atlantic, and you absolutely have very experienced warriors coming over.

And sometimes this takes colonial authorities a bit by surprise. And then, in varying contexts, and I'm speaking very generally, because this is a very hard thing to be necessarily specific about unless we drill down into certain cases. But sometimes they're just taken by surprise like, "wow, these guys can really fight." Sometimes they realize, "oh, these guerrilla tactics. Oh, this is how they wait, this is what they do." And it's really effective, because they can use the mountains and they can use the forest and they know how to lay traps and they know how to ambush. And you imagine these white British soldiers in woolen coats, sweating in the Caribbean, running up through a jungle and being ambushed. And this is, to me, like images of the Maroon Wars of the late 1730s, for instance. And so, you also have that style of warfare, who is a warrior, who is not a warrior. That enters the equation as well, because it seemed, I think, and again, other historians might debate me on this, but the kind of idea like, "oh, we're up against these African warriors. So it's like this legitimate war. Oh, but a woman's involved in this rebellion. Oh, well, then it's just a conspiracy, it's just a rebellion". So I think there's a lot of intersections, to borrow the term intersectionality, but there is in this, I think, that's the thing. It's like the domains of who is a soldier, who is not.

And of course, there are histories. You have Queen Nzinga in what would be today's Angola, famously warrior queen. Obviously there are traditions of women fighting within Africa, but of course Europeans and colonial powers aren't necessarily very understanding of that. Or again, it's not happening consistently. It's not like they're only meeting female battalions on the west coast of Africa or things like that. So they have trouble making, more trouble making sense of it, I think. So this is the problem is that we're talking about these enormous landscapes, enormous diversity as well, in terms of West African practices. And then what happens when they get to, again, a very diverse region, which is the Caribbean and the Americas.

AT: I do wonder how much of it was also a desire to save face and the idea that these people in power would not have wanted to necessarily present this as a viable force, right? They didn't want to actually admit that the other side could win. And when you're talking about, "okay, well, we can say that these are warriors." And of course, part of the racism was the idea that Black bodies are stronger and there's like that greater physicality and so they could kind of justify it that way. But admitting that women were a real threat, like a major part of a real threat was just one step too far.

CG: Yeah, I think that falls in line with what the gender, I think, expectations were of that time as well. Good example of this, I think is an extract from my book about this woman who blows up a ship and how they think it must have been an accident: 'Her name was unknown, her description unrecorded, apart from the fact that she had a pipe. Like a few other of the 135 Negroes on this vessel,' and that's a quote, "anchored about two miles from the coast of Guinea in August 1862, this woman was having a smoke. The fact that the pipe was not unusual, as enslaved people were," being allowed by the master to take tobacco." They were not supposed to do so between decks, but rather above for fear of mischief that may ensue thereby.

Now, two crew members spotted this woman in her pipe, just moments before they were "blown out of the said ship into the sea," by an explosion. Second mate John Layton, who survived the blast and floated on a piece of wood for hours until he was rescued, later told the British Admiralty Court that he remembered carpenter Nathaniel Mills saying he did "see a Negro woman between deck of the said ship who had fire with her, which he did take to be a pipe of tobacco lighted, which he had got." Apparently Mills did observe that she did fling the same pipe lighted from her, which he really believed did fall into the hull of the said ship where the powder was instantly and the ship thereupon was blown up.

So the name of the vessel, unlike that of the woman, was recorded, the Dorothy. It had set off from the Tilbury

Docks outside of London in November 1861 in pursuit of Negro slaves and golden elephants teeth. They had some success, obviously, in human cargo, but because the vessel was destroyed and did not return, it prompted an inquest to which it was never acknowledged that this woman who threw her flame into the powder storage between decks quite possibly knew exactly what she was doing. Maybe this pipe-smoking African woman was willing to blow up everyone else in order to save them from their fate.'

So I think this story is quite an interesting one, because he observes her doing this, but the inquest basically is just like, "maybe you shouldn't let women above deck." It doesn't translate into any policy and as Rebecca Hall finds in *Wake* when she starts looking at the examples like this on slave ships, a couple things that she finds are really interesting. One, it was more likely there would be a slave revolt if there was a high proportion of women onboard. And part of that is their mobility. So you have something like this where one guy's like, "yeah, she threw the pipe and it must have fallen in the hole." And it's like, so you think it's a good idea to let women hang around and smoke pipes? The fact that the mobility continued meant that at some level, and by mobility I mean some women were held under the hold the whole time, but some were allowed to be above deck to smoke some tobacco, sometimes they were put to use, sometimes they were obviously sexually violated as well. But what that meant was they were not shackled. They could move around, they could plot, they could go, "oh my God, there's the powder keg, I'm just going to throw a match on it," and, and just let it happen. Or that, we don't know. That might have been decided among a group of people. This is what I mean, these are the kind of things we get, like this is two paragraphs.

And it's very hard to come to any firm conclusions. But so in Hall's book, she finds that it's more likely, the more women there are, the more likely it was that there was going to be a revolt. And part of that is the mobility that women were given, because again, they still weren't seen as necessarily as threatening as having the men unshackled and, being able to be moved freely on board. So I think that is a useful example of, how these things intersect, it's just kind of dismissed as an incident, and it's recorded. And, she did throw it in there. But did she really mean to do it? It's like, looking at this 300 years later, it's like, maybe there was some design in this. So I found that one. Yeah, that's, that's obviously in the book. It's, again, one of those examples where lots of these points kind of come together.

AT: So a parallel that's popping up in my brain right now is, as we're talking about women flying under the radar, being underestimated, and perhaps one reason we don't have as much documentation about them is if they were doing the stealthy, subtle sabotage, because I like alliteration. But it's making me think of the Special Operations Executive of predominantly women spies working in occupied France during World War Two. And these women were not seen as a threat, they were seen as just part of the landscape essentially by enemy soldiers, they were underestimated. And they use that to their advantage. And fortunately, we have a lot more documentation about the SOE. But it is making me wonder, how much of that lack of records is just because the women weren't doing overt actions as much? Maybe they weren't getting caught?

CG: Yeah, the women had the communications network. And there's actually a lovely series of illustrations in *Wake* where each panel's like a woman whispering to the other, "meet at the well," or something like that. And it's absolutely wonderful, because it's such a nice visual. And in fact, that kind of movement of information comes up very briefly in the Malê revolt, which was a Muslim slave revolt in Brazil in 1835. And it was an urban revolt, so slightly unusual because of that. And basically, one of the main women involved in this later reports to the authority, she rats out the conspiracy, but she overhears from her window, she claims she overhears three women talking about these plans for this revolt, and they're going to meet to fetch water. They're going to talk about the battle when they fetch water at 5am. So they're going to meet at public fountains and get their water like normal. But then they're going to talk about what to do. And she alleged that she heard them underneath her window. So if you think about Salvador de Bahia being crowded and people in the streets and whatever. And so this woman overhears this information and she then has this quandary about what to do and she ends up reporting it.

But I bring this this example up because I like this idea that this woman's sitting at her window and then these other women, underneath, not realizing that, she's listening, going, "okay, we're gonna fetch the water at the fountains, and there's gonna be a battle. And we're gonna know what to do." And I think there's a lot in that, again, these are like little glimpses. Sometimes revolts or uprisings could really could almost be immediate reactions to something, but the bigger ones, the ones that were plotted and planned and took months of preparation. Who were the conduits? It had to be them - in some ways, working backwards, you think, well, it has to be the women, right? Because they're the ones that could move through, "oh, I've got to go to market. Oh, I've got to go," especially people who had access to the main plantation house or people who are in an urban setting. Like these women fetching water, they might have been domestic servants rather than, this was not a rural plantation sort of setting. So I think there's so much of that. But that's not the questions the officials are asking when they haul people in for testimony either, necessarily. It's more, "who plotted it? Where did you get your weapons?" Sometimes it's just, a lot of the testimony in some of these cases is just the officials trying to put the story together. And that leaves out this sort of, earlier aspects where women are involved with moving information.

And alongside that, we almost never talk about children. They are completely written out in many ways. And I'm thinking of this in terms of more modern war times, but children as messengers or spies. And certainly, women were in very good positions to spy, especially if they were in domestic situations, or they were domestic situations where they were the enslaved servants of the governor or one of the big military leaders or militia leaders. And it's probably the questions that are asked at that time. And I've got another example. And this is this one's really instructive. So there was a big revolt in 1816 in Barbados, around Easter, and it's known as Bussa's Rebellion now. But the way it starts is, there's a woman named Nanny Grigg. And her name comes up in the subsequent testimony, because there's a select committee hearing about this, this revolt is a big deal back in Britain, it's a big deal on the island. So she was literate, and she could read the newspapers. And she told people that they were going to be freed from New Year's. And what historians have said afterwards is that she was confusing, there was a long running fight over the slave registers, which was a measure abolitionists wanted to bring in to make people list enslaved people in their plantations, to cut down on smuggling, or illicit trade, and there was a lot of confusion over that information. And as that information moved, it was also possibly considered to be seen as this step towards emancipation, as that step towards freedom. So, at the same time that you have newspapers and you have people reading things, you also have these other informal conduits of information. And so, she got the idea that basically, everybody's gonna be free in 1816. And so people were getting upset. And this happens a lot when there are rumors or promises of either better treatment, like in terms of more days off. And that's one thing that was often rumors, like, "oh, we'll have two days to work our provision grounds, or three days." There are often rumors that "the king has freed us." But basically, if there's a gap between the reality of legislation and its implementation, it was often blamed by the colonial authorities, "they're hiding things from us, the planters are hiding things from us, the authorities are hiding things from us."

And so this is the mood in early 1816 Barbados. And Nanny steps up, she tells them, and this is quoted from the testimony, that they were all damned fools to work. Now that is somebody paraphrasing what she allegedly told people. She basically said they had not been told the truth. And the authorities were hiding their freedom. And she then told some of the others on her plantation that they needed to, quote, "set fire as that was what they did in Saint-Domingue," i.e. Haiti. So she brings up Haiti, like, all right, we need a revolt. And this isn't Nanny's revolt. It's Bussa's. And another man named Jackie end up being the ringleaders, but actually some historians have even gone, "I **think** they were the ringleaders, but we, they were named as the ringleaders." And I'm looking at this and I just keep thinking, "why's Nanny just show up and then disappear?" And it seems that actually she clearly had some kind of organizational role in this. And a lot of cane fields were destroyed. This one lingered about a month. But it was a big deal. And also Barbados had not had a serious revolt in a couple of centuries at this point. So this is a big deal back in Britain and, and it started to open up the conversation about "we just need to end slavery. This is an unsustainable system." So it's a really, really

important revolt because of that, because of where it falls in the 19th century and where it falls in the wider British discussion of abolition. But it's not Nanny's rebellion. And I'm just kind of like, "well, she's the one telling everybody they need to burn the house down, like they did in Saint-Domingue." And again, I'm not saying Bussa and Jackie weren't important. But I'm also saying, it's just unclear.

AT: I think it's that the implication is that all the other historians are saying Nanny isn't important. So it's not that we're trying to undermine the men involved, it's that we're trying to reverse the undermining that's happened to the woman.

CG: Yeah, I feel like Caribbean historians tend to be quite, I'm thinking of the older generation. I'm not thinking like now. We're still fairly sensitive to questions of gender, but it was still, I'm thinking of historiography from 30 or 40 years ago, perhaps those implicit biases were still there. It's kind of like, "oh, this Nanny woman was interesting, but she couldn't have been the leader." That being said, I think there have been some reappraisals, but I haven't seen anything. And please, I'd love a reader to say, "no, no, no, did you not know about this journal article about Nanny Grigg?" But I feel like nobody's kind of gone back to her. I think more recent stuff describes her as being this instigating force. But, again, future PhD student, there's a great mystery - who's Nanny Grigg and what was she doing? And unfortunately, with a book like mine that tries to cover an enormous amount of ground, I can't go deep into this. But I think that just trying to make sure that these women are included in this book and explaining their role, as much as we know, is actually quite important. She's not some old lady sitting in a rocking chair. She's inciting people on her plantation to rise up and get the freedom they have been denied. So I think that's enormously important.

AT: Well, it's funny that you say, "Oh, she's not just some old woman in a rocking chair," because the name Nanny, I think has a lot of connotations in terms of a maternal figure, a servant figure. And I'd be very curious, I doubt that was the name she was born with. But it can also be a nickname for someone named Ann, just to be fair. But I also find it interesting that when we're talking about Nanny Grigg in Barbados, there's also another Nanny that we shouldn't be getting her confused with, who was also a badass. So could you tell us about Nanny of the Maroons?

CG: Yeah, so Nanny, apparently as well, and sort of one thing I read, it comes from Asante word, Nana, which means respected elder and Ni, which also can mean first mother. So we have two languages being mixed up a bit because obviously in English, it is a maternal vision. And the name Nanny comes up a lot. It's a name used a lot by white enslavers who are not particularly sensitive to the nuances of language. And obviously the whole totally problematic issue of not just accepting people's names. So there's a lot of Nannies. But the Nanny you're referring to is Nanny of the Maroons, who is a badass. But again, there's four archival mentions of her. However, her prowess is known. She is referred to as being a leader and there is a Maroon colony called Nannytown. So we know that she was an important and significant leader.

But it's interesting because I was thinking about this in relation to coming on here and talking to you. Nanny now is on the \$500 note, I think, in Jamaica. She's on one of the big notes. And she's a national heroine. I think she's still the only woman in the Jamaican pantheon of heroes. And thinking about that maternal role, the idea of Nanny, or even looking at the Asante thing, both the respective female elder and then this English version of this mother figure. And Nanny of the Maroons kind of combines that. Now, whether that's how she would have seen herself, obviously she's given that role these hundreds of years later, certainly the more maternal mother of the nation idea comes much, much, much later. But what I find really interesting about Nanny is that she fights the British in the Maroon War in 1739. And then in 1740, I believe this is the last archival mention of her, there's a land patent. So her Nannytown got destroyed during this conflict between the British and the Maroons. And the British seized the land and they seized some of the Maroon land under treaty, dealt with the others, because they wanted obviously some of it to be settled and turned into sugar plantations or whatever.

But Nanny manages to get a grant of land, and the grant gives her like 500 acres and it becomes New Nannytown, which then becomes Moortown. And that becomes a Maroon colony, I think until the present day. So she obviously got the last word in, in some ways. And this is the other part of the story, is the role in place of oral tradition. And Nanny is a really important example of that because people go into the public records office in Kew and try to find Nanny. And then there's the history on the ground and the history among Maroons and the oral history. And that's very important in trying to pull some of these stories together as well, and especially for researchers who want to go deeper into what the possibilities of the past were. Like, here's what we know is recorded and here's what we know people say about this 300 years later. So how do we divine a path through that and make sense of this person who clearly had a strong enough legacy to be, we're still talking about Nanny today. And we're still talking about Nanny Grigg. So, obviously, these are two very important Nannies.

AT: I do find it funny that some people act like oral history is not valid until it gets written down, but they're ignoring that, how much of what we know about like Viking history or Greek history, like ancient histories. How much of that was written hundreds of years after the fact. So it's a whole bugbear of mine. And I don't want to sidetrack this because I will go on a rant. Instead, I would like to ask about, anybody who's a regular listener may remember that I have another episode with the fabulous Marlene Daut about Queen Marie-Louise of Haiti. And so she gave us a very abbreviated but in-depth history of the Haitian Revolution to tell that story. So anybody who really wants to know about Haiti specifically should go listen to that episode. But also, you wanted to tell us about a woman that, again, I believe this is someone that we don't have a name for, but I believe it's pronounced Mulâtresse Solitude?

CG: Yeah, she was known by Solitude and has been referred to as Mulâtresse, which means mixed African/European origin. And this relates to Haiti because this happens in the neighboring French colony of Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe is fighting a very similar battle to Haiti, or to Saint-Domingue as it was. France abolishes slavery in 1794 across its empire. It pretty much was technically not a thing in France. In the sense that the French sort of said, "oh, the air of France is free." Now, did people bring enslaved people as their servants? There were gray areas, just like there were in Britain. But 1794, French Revolution, all of this clarified, no slavery. And this is obviously brought about by events in Saint-Domingue. This is, to give credit where it's due, the enslaved people of Saint-Domingue forced the administrator's hand. [Listen to Marlene Daut on Queen Marie-Louise of Haiti](#) or [read the transcript](#).

What else is going on at the same time is that the British are playing out the Napoleonic Wars in the Caribbean as well. They have occupied Martinique. They are fighting to take back under British control St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Grenada, and they briefly occupy Guadeloupe. The governor manages to rally now freed people and free people of color and drive the British out. And so in theory, there is no slavery. The reality is more complicated in terms of keeping the sugar economy going, but that's a whole other podcast episode. So technically, slavery is over in Guadeloupe. And this happens in Saint-Domingue as well. There's a lot of pressure, shall we say, on formerly enslaved people to keep working on the plantation. But for all intents and purposes, people see themselves as free in the French Revolution as this force that they can live under in freedom. And then Napoleon Bonaparte shows up and he decides that it's not really working for him. So the French decide that, okay, so the conflict between, I think it's the Second Napoleonic War, basically the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, that is supposed to bring everything to an end in Europe, will also have ramifications in the Caribbean. And one of them is that any island taken from France and given back to it by the British, the slaves will be liberated. The French rules will not apply because, well, we're actually going to scrap that provision really. So obviously people in Saint-Domingue know this, and this is where you get the final push of the Haitian Revolution, but they know it in Guadeloupe as well. And the go-to book on this is Laurent Dubois' *Colony of Citizens*. So I highly recommend that for people who are interested in Guadeloupe. And they should be because it often is overlooked, with Haiti getting the lion's share of attention, but there's a really interesting struggle here.

And so Solitude is this woman who gets mentioned in all of this. And again, the mention of her is only in one place, which is a mid-19th century account of this final struggle against the French in 1802. So as far as I understand, and I'm both following Laurent Dubois' footnotes and then going back to the source that he cites, and that source doesn't have any other sources. So I think a lot of the Guadeloupe records might have been lost. So there's very, very few sources. So one of the go-to ones is an account written by somebody who is able to interview, I believe, some of the survivors of this. So it's like mid-19th century, this ends in 1802. So just a short moment where the author is a French historian named Auguste Lacour, and he's describing this prison account, very briefly, that some of the rebels have, and they've captured a bunch of French prisoners. And into this walks Solitude, this is where this is her only scene. And basically, they're talking about what should we do, what should we do with these French, like in front of the French, "should we kill them?"

Because at this point, the battle has become against France now. It's clear that France, under Napoleon, France, allegedly revolutionary France, whatever it is now, is going to reinstate them. So his has become the battle line. So what are we going to do with these French prisoners? And this woman comes in, and apparently she has rabbits. Now, I'm guessing she has rabbits because that's what they were eating in the camp. Like, I'm guessing maybe she was involved in the food or something, because I don't think she just reached out and grabbed a bunny out of a bush. I think it says that she had rabbits. And one was trying to escape, so she grabbed it. And then, and I'll quote from the books, I've got it here. "She picked up a knife, pursued it, pierced it, and held it up in front of the prisoners, saying to them, here is how I will treat you when the time comes." Which is kind of some badassery, right? Like, let me just slit this rabbit in front of you and be like, "this is what I'm going to do to you." It is quite an image. Now, of course, Lacour then later calls her a *mauve génie*, like a evil genius, and paints this picture of her as this powerful force, but again, it's a very short mention.

Now, what's unclear is if she's pregnant at that time, but she is definitely pregnant by the time she's arrested, which is in November, I think, of that year of 1802. And she is cited for the gallows. So again, this indicates that she had a place in this and she was enough of a threat to want the authorities to kill her. They allowed her to have the baby, and then they killed her. But what's really interesting, and this is very much like Nanny, is, there's not a lot to go on. And again, please, if anyone's like, "no, no, no, there is," and I've missed it, please tell me, especially because I'm in the edits with my book, so I'd love to get a bit more, but I've not been able to find anything beyond this, really. But there's a statue of her, she is an island hero. So no, Guadeloupe is still an overseas department of France, so technically it is still a colony. So, Nanny is a symbol of liberation, because Jamaica is an independent country. So, Solitude is a similar figure, but obviously the colonial relationship is different there. But just outside the capital in Guadeloupe, there's this road of heroes in a series of roundabouts, which makes it quite hard to hop out of your car. So it's a slightly strange road, but anyway, at the end of it is this woman, Solitude, and she's very heavily pregnant in the sculptor's depiction. And in fact, there's something tied under her waist, maybe a shawl or shirt and really bring out the belly. And she's standing there very young and defiant and looking into the distance and, so again, this, maybe need for a maternal, fierce mother of the island identity, shall we say, and yet we're going on quite, quite slim, slightly secondhand, perhaps, understanding. And that's actually a really interesting thing where oral history and official histories sort of meet, because Lacour doesn't have any footnotes, but he's only one of the few sources for this whole period. So there's a lot going on with that.

But it's a fascinating story in the image. And imagine her if she was actually visibly pregnant, like pulling this rabbit and slicing it open and French officers. And basically she doesn't get to do that because the camp was attacked and then they had to flee and then eventually she ends up captured. But again, Louis Delgrès was the kind of hero of this last push to save the island from re-enslavement, but within the island, she's clearly considered important. So yeah, her story is a really interesting glimpse of ferocity as well. But it's hard to know when the interlocutor is a European writing at a distance, like calling her an evil genius. Like, what are you trying to tell us? Is that because she's, what are you trying to say with that? Did she have more of a role than we should know about? Or are you just saying that because she was a woman who dared to be badass? I don't know.

AT: It is notable that that theme of maternity has come up, like we were talking about with the name Nanny, and this is something that comes up a lot in other conversations as well, where whether we're talking about a queen who is ruling as a caretaker for their minor child or positioning themselves as the mother of the nation, whether it's activists who position themselves, like there are so many like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Mothers for this or against that. I don't know that there are really that many fathers' organizations. But yeah, activists, queens, and yes, even ferocity like that military, like the idea that a mother is allowed to protect her child and that's one of the few areas where it is socially acceptable for a woman to become violent or aggressive or however you want to frame that. So that is something that is definitely a recurring theme in different conversations and I find it fascinating because you do see it across all these different types of women in different situations. Now, I did want to also ask about Cuba, where there are two women, Carlotta and Fermina, who have their own interesting story, if you'd like to tell us about that.

CG: I include them in the section about Cuba. And this context is, in the 1840s there's a series of revolts, another series of conspiracies that have the colonial officials freaked out. It's, the whole period is known as La Escalera. And that means the ladder and it's called the ladder because they tied people to the ladder and whipped them in punishment. So it's a really, really horrible moment in Cuban history. And some of the really interesting stuff that's been done about these two women comes from Aisha Finch's *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba*, which I highly recommend to everyone, because she takes a more female-focused lens, but not exclusively, in thinking about these revolts and conspiracies. So I definitely highly recommend it. So both of these women had the denomination of Lucumi, which in Cuba was a word that was sometimes used as almost like a surname, but it was also a nation. Basically, it was people from the Bight of Benin. So Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin, that area, they were called Lucumi in Cuba. And there were a number of uprisings and rebellions in the plantation zone of Matanzas, which was the big sugar growing region.

So with Cuba, it has two phases. So there's the early Cuba, which is mostly urban slavery. It's a ship port. It's a military installation. And then after the Haitian Revolution, Cuba pivots and goes, "oh, we've got this enormous island and a lot of land. And it's really good for growing sugar. And oh, look what just happened." And decide to step up the slave trade and step up the sugar trade. So you get massive influxes of Africans. And this is happening, and I probably can't say this enough, because I think there's this idea that once Britain got out of the slave trade, everybody got out of the slave trade. And it's like, no, no, no, no, no, no. And there's plenty of illicit saving that goes on by British traders, by US traders who are technically out of the slave trade as well. But there's a lot of smuggling. But there's also a lot of above-board slave-trading, because Britain was not able to convince every single country to stop at that point. So people are being taken to Cuba. And the plantations are growing. And so it's a time of transformation. It's a time of great tension. And so around this time, you get a series of revolts, uprising, unrest across these estates. And Fermina is on one of the estates, and she is thought to have been involved in something else. And they lock her up, they put her in shackles, and they flog her. And this is the the summer of 1843. And a few days later, she's released, and then an even bigger revolt takes place. So, if you connect the dots with that, as some historians have, like Professor Finch saying, "well, she probably had quite a big role in organizing some of these uprisings." And apparently later witnesses were found to say things, testified that she was yelling directions, like "the whites are escaping" or, "grab, go get that man" and indicating that she was giving orders or directions.

Now, Carlotta was also a woman from a nearby estate and understood that they knew each other. And what happens with Carlotta, and her trajectory becomes quite interesting, but she was also involved in this summer of unrest. And she attacked an overseer's daughter in one plantation and encouraged others to continue what she had started, basically kill this woman, and goes on to do something else. And she's found the next day, just dead in the fighting. Fermina ends up arrested. And this time, she's executed, she's one of eight, like there's seven men and her, and they're all executed, and their bodies were burned, like they were very much to be made an example of to suppress all this unrest that's going on in this plantation zone. But Carlotta gets picked up later on, like in the '70s, and is made into this freedom fighting figure, interestingly, and becomes an image

of resistance in '70s Cuba. So I think Finch's work is really great at unpicking this and talking about it. And I'm just summarizing it, but I think this is a really important story to put in this bigger panorama that I'm trying to build. And it shows how we have to work backward from things like testimony. So we have to look at what other women were saying about these women, and they were saying, "well, she was giving directions, I wasn't, so please don't kill me, because I wasn't involved in this." Because that's the other thing, when it comes to the testimonies, there's plenty of women who will be like, "oh, I had nothing to do with this." And Fermina actually protested her own participation as well. So fair enough, she, I'm sure, having already been flogged and shackled, knew what was to come.

But it's interesting, and I think maybe this circles around to the motherhood point, is that, Carlotta becomes more of a martyr, maybe? I feel like Fermina is as much of a martyr as Carlotta in some ways. I guess it depends what the metric for martyrdom is. But the story of these two women in that summer leading up to La Escalera, and just that time of unrest in Cuba, these stories stand out. I think there's some questions around, the fact that they were Lucumi, like, were they recent Africans, what's their connection to actual warfare, it raises more questions than we have answers to. But also, one of the reasons I wanted to include them in the overall book was to bring Cuba into this as well. I think sometimes, and this is a larger problem in the field in general, is understanding how these geographies relate to each other. These things are not just only Jamaica, or only the English-speaking Caribbean, it's Cuba, it's Saint-Domingue, it's everywhere. And it's the system, and I suppose on that point of it being the system, and this is one of the takeaways from my book is that having a system of slavery in the Americas corrupts everyone, because one of the things that I really had to grapple with are the women who don't join in, are the women who rat out the conspiracies and the men, are the ones who don't get involved, and trying to make sense of what was at stake for them. Often ratting out a conspiracy and telling the authorities was your ticket to freedom.

And this is what I mean about the system corrupts everyone, because what are your choices? Have a revolt where you kill people? Rat out people, and watch possibly innocent people get hung for conspiracy that doesn't happen, but you get your freedom. But all the choices are impossible in a system of slavery, I think, is one of the takeaways. And so trying to understand the decisions women make in that context is also very complicated. It's always nice to have heroines, but it's also, like you say, they always have to be tethered to motherhood? What are we looking for from these heroines? And also, can we even find that in a system that was impossible? It was impossible. Which is why ultimately, it ended, but it was impossible for everyone who lived in it. And certainly, certainly enslaved women most of all, people most of all, but women, I think, carried this extra element, this extra burden. And then when we look back at that history, it's like, how we try to shape what we do know.

AT: Something that's come up for me with the Cuban story in particular, is the fact that even if we have someone's own testimony, in whatever context that is, their own writing, verbal testimony to another person or in court, whatever, they're telling their own story. The simple fact is that, as you were saying, there's a lot of reasons for women to do what they did, including lying, like if you are accused of being involved in a slave revolt, most enslaved peoples would have a very strong incentive to lie, to protect themselves, to not get tortured, to not potentially have people they loved being punished because of them, whether that's children you were forced to bear, friends, other relatives. There are a lot of incentives for people to lie, either about themselves or about others. And so that adds this extra layer of complexity to these stories.

CG: But also, with a lot of testimony, it is mediated. There's very little, probably not till you get to the 19th century, it's usually through a scribe. So it's really until we get to slave narratives, we actually start getting, but even those are mediated as well, as we spoke about last time. So, getting to the actual nub of women's voices, absolutely. And it's true. And you see this across slave revolts, with men and women, that most people do try to protest their innocence, but sometimes you just get people who just refuse to say anything. And they know they're going to go to the gallows, and they're just not going to rat. But those are few and far between, because

the human impulse to want to stay alive, and the ramifications for other people.

And so if you think about women, particularly, if there are children involved, then there is more incentive to maybe stay away from a conspiracy revolt, or, lie and say no, I didn't have any role in this. So, there's definitely that element as well. And so, that's one of the challenges in trying to assess this whole period. And for me, the ultimate question of trying to accept, make sense of if freedom even exists, which I'm not necessarily convinced. So when you look at the multiple binds that women were in this, it's very hard to see a route to freedom for anyone in this entire system.

And I think, too, perhaps easy to gloss over to just think, well, a slave revolt's natural, of course there were slave revolts. And of course, there were, but what that took the actual doing it the actual, Carlotta's saying, "keep flogging her" or Fermina saying, "go after," just the adrenaline, the being in the moment, being a soldier, being fighting, just all of it is extraordinary in itself. And unfortunately, we just don't have granular access to, there are no battle diaries for these women, or prison diaries. I have to say, for any, especially for any aspiring novelist out there, please, please pick one of these stories. And I think there's so much to explore thematically in the stories of any of these women.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.