Book Reviews

Marisa J. Fuentes. *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive.* Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. 232. Paper $24.95.

Dispossessed Lives is a micro-historical study of enslaved and free women in 18th-century Bridgetown, Barbados. Marisa J. Fuentes, Associate Professor of Women's & Gender Studies and History and the Presidential Term Chair in African American History at Rutgers University, utilizes individual histories for her focused analysis on the place of specific women within Bridgetown's society. Employing "black feminist epistemologies [and] critical studies of archival power and form," this monograph speaks to historiographies within the field of slavery studies that explore the construction of race, gender, and sexuality imposed on women, both free and enslaved (1). By paying substantial attention to the role of the archive in the construction of these women's identities, this analysis demonstrates how the archive serves as another site in which the enslaved woman continues to be subjected to violence. Fuentes also explores the limits of allowed agency for free and enslaved women in this society, both Black and white. Fuentes argues that the archive aids in the further violation and subjugation of the enslaved. She does this by illustrating the ways in which archival documents provide insight into the uncertainty of fugitive survival, the construction of sexuality among enslaved women, the agency granted to white women, and the violence imposed on the enslaved female body. Her analysis draws upon primary sources like an advertisement to locate a runaway slave, a will, legal proceeding records, deposition notes, council minutes, and declarations to reconstruct the lives of those living in this society.

This layered analysis from within the archive creates narratives read from between the lines. Making clear that these archival documents are products stemming from access to literacy and resources, they are used in a way that questions perceptions held about these women and how they are presented through the

lens of white colonial power. This monograph grants agency to both the free and enslaved, simply by giving them a voice beyond what has been documented through selective narration.

The book consists of five chapters (excluding the introduction and epilogue) each named after a specific woman found within the archive. Each chapter is an exploration of their specific conditions within larger themes of control, power, freedom, racialized gender, condemnation, abolition discourse, and gendered violence. Separating herself from traditional frameworks of analysis, the author uses archival materials to construct narratives that go beyond what has been recorded. This method disrupts previous interpretations about the lives of both enslaved and free Black women in slave societies. Although the details provided by these archival documents are limited, she relies on factual speculation and depersonalized qualitative analyses of the region to build their narratives as living, breathing individuals navigating their day-to-day lives in this society. This is not a retelling of what has been said or what is meant to be known. It is an exploration of another point of view. An analysis that separates itself from the male-centered narration of slavery, through its many conditions and systems, to center women, Black, white, free, and enslaved.

Dispossessed Lives is a testament to the complexity of historical narratives and an important contribution to the field of slavery, race, gender, and sexuality studies. Advanced undergraduate and graduate students and experts in the field will enjoy exploring the role of women in slave societies beyond their existence as property and racialized bodies while simultaneously questioning the archive and its problems. It is a useful example that demonstrates the way in which archival sources can be utilized to construct the lives of those who have been historically disregarded as individuals beyond their imposed conditions.

Maria Nolasco