



"THE WORLD THAT FEAR MADE" BY JASON SHARPLES **UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS**

BOOK ANALYZES SLAVE REVOLTS AND CONSPIRACY SCARES IN EARLY AMERICA

Jason Sharples, Associate Professor of History, recently had his book "The World that Fear Made" published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. From the Stono Rebellion in 1739 to the Haitian Revolution of 1791 to Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, slave insurrections have been understood as emblematic rejections of enslavement, the most powerful and, perhaps, the only way for slaves to successfully challenge the brutal system they endured. "The World That Fear Made: Slave Revolts and Conspiracy Scares in Early America" orients the mirror to those in power who were preoccupied with their exposure to insurrection. Because enslavers in British North America and the Caribbean methodically terrorized slaves and anticipated just vengeance, colonial officials consolidated their regime around the dread of rebellion.

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Sharples researches and writes about colonial North America, the colonial Caribbean, and the American Revolution. He has conducted this research in historical archives and rare book libraries in the United States, the Caribbean and Europe.

As Sharples shows through a comprehensive data set, colonial officials launched investigations into dubious rumors of planned revolts twice as often as actual slave uprisings occurred.

Mining archival records, Sharples shows how colonists from New York to Barbados tortured slaves to solicit confessions of baroque plots that were strikingly consistent across places and periods. Informants claimed that conspirators took direction from foreign agents; timed alleged rebellions for a holiday such as Easter; planned to set fires that would make it easier to ambush white people in the confusion; and coordinated the uprising with European or Native American invasion forces. Yet, as Sharples demonstrates, these scripted accounts rarely resembled what enslaved rebels actually did when they took up arms. Ultimately, he argues, conspiracy scares locked colonists and slaves into a cycle of terror that bound American society together through shared racial fear.

"In vivid prose, Sharples distinguishes between bloody fact and paranoid fantasy to reveal how rumors of imminent slave insurrections created the southern surveillance state, informed imperial ambitions, and bound white colonists together in common terror." – Richard Bell, author of *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home*

More about the book here:

upenn.edu/pennpress/book/16083.html

Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters "In Conversation" podcast interview at fau.edu/artsandletters/podcast

To see the link to an interview with Jason about the book by the African American Intellectual History Society (AAIHS) as part of their Black Perspectives blog series, visit: tinyurl.com/yxzpynv6

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