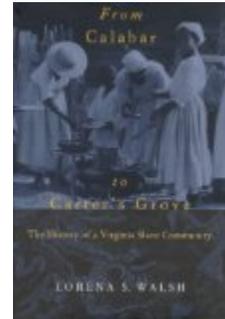


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Lorena S. Walsh. *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community*. Charlottesville, NC: University Press of Virginia, 1997. Xxii + 335 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8139-1719-1.

Reviewed by Karen R. Utz (History Department, University of Alabama-Birmingham)  
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Among the hundreds of articles and books dealing with the institution of slavery, few venture beyond the morality thesis ... the question of “right and wrong.” *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Community* is different. Lorena Walsh provides a detailed and concise analysis of what life was like for slaves on a tidewater Virginia plantation (Burwell Plantation) in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

Through the use of an amazing array of primary and secondary materials, Walsh reconstructs this unique Virginia slave community from its development in the 1700s, its encounter with the American Revolution, to its westward migration in the late 1700s. Although Walsh provides a vast amount of graphs, pictures, charts, and slave inventories-inventories complete with slave women by the name of Jacob and Frank, “From Calabar to Carter's Grove,” is not a dry statistical overview of an antebellum plantation. It is an insightful and enlightening look at what slaves endured in their daily lives. By using plantation records and artifacts, Walsh not only presents the early African origins of the Burwell slaves, but reveals the importance of religion in their lives, how they named their children, their diet, dress, language, and the role of white indentured servants in slave society.

The majority of the original Burwell slaves came from the Niger River Delta in Africa. Walsh provides a detailed account on how these individuals lived and survived in their native land, and how they endured the “middle passage” to the “civilized” New World. Of particular interest, Walsh not only looks at the daily routine of the Burwell slaves, but at the many important roles black slaves played in society during this period. In 1676, as Nathaniel Bacon prepared to lead the largest insurrec-

tion against a colonial government until the American Revolution, many of the men marching alongside Bacon were black slaves and former black servants. Plantation account and medical books provide a look into the types of medical care Burwell plantation owners provided their slaves. The mistress or the master proved to be the primary caretaker when slaves broke a bone or came down with “ague, dysentery, and intestinal parasites.” By the 1780s, the mistress of Burwell Plantation, as on many other plantations, allowed black women to oversee the majority of slave ailments. Nonetheless, Walsh notes that even by this time, “European trained local doctors” were being called in to treat the adult slaves. Furthermore, while many plantations left slave women to give birth assisted only by a black midwife, pregnant slave women on Burwell Plantation were assisted by hired professional midwives. Walsh reveals this not only protected the financial interests of the owner, but since many of the women (in the early 1770s) giving birth were African-born ... “their collective experience with child-birthing was perhaps limited.”

Lorena Walsh is awarded credit for painstakingly piecing together numerous primary and secondary materials to reveal how slave culture grew and evolved on one particular plantation. The indepth appendix, bibliography, and end note sections demand a thorough reivev and reveal how local records and artifacts can supply a wealth of information on the complexity of the American slave system ... or what Southern whites used to call the “peculiar institution.” *From Calabar to Carter's Grove* would be invaluable to American historians, archeologists, and individuals interested in African-American history.

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