



Foreshadowing Vesey: the Camden slave conspiracy of 1816

Tim Lockley

To cite this article: Tim Lockley (2022): Foreshadowing Vesey: the Camden slave conspiracy of 1816, American Nineteenth Century History, DOI: [10.1080/14664658.2022.2133763](https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2022.2133763)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2022.2133763>



Published online: 24 Oct 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Foreshadowing Vesey: the Camden slave conspiracy of 1816

Tim Lockley

Department of History, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

ABSTRACT

The Vesey conspiracy was the largest in North America, yet historians have failed to establish the wider contexts for how white authorities responded to the plot. This article points to a conspiracy in Camden, South Carolina, in 1816 to argue that many of the responses to Vesey derived from participants' knowledge of Camden. In particular, those representing Charleston in the state legislature gained first-hand knowledge of the plot and several later became key actors in the Vesey trials. The Camden conspiracy in 1816 thus established the wider socio-political context for the unfolding of the Vesey trials in 1822.

KEYWORDS

Slavery; South Carolina;
Camden

The Denmark Vesey plot was the largest conspiracy by enslaved people in North America, in which 131 people were arrested and 35 were executed. Unsurprisingly, historians have paid it similar attention to that devoted to actual revolts such as Stono (1739) and Nat Turner (1831).¹ The voluminous documentary record relating to the Vesey conspiracy that includes most of the trial records, as well as reflections on the events by white participants and observers, has encouraged historians to offer their interpretations not only of the motivations of the plotters but also how white authorities responded to the crisis. Some, Richard Wade and Michael Johnson most notably, have doubted the very existence of a conspiracy, believing it to be a product of white paranoia. They point to the contemporary criticism by Supreme Court justice and Charleston native William Johnson about “popular excitement” that could lead to miscarriages of justice.² Governor Thomas Bennett additionally complained about the secretive nature of court proceedings, with the public excluded and the accused denied the chance to hear the testimony against them.³ Others, led by Robert Paquette and Douglas Egerton, have pushed back strongly against this line of argument, stressing the importance of post-conviction confessions made by the Vesey conspirators to members of the Charleston clergy. As for Bennett's concerns, these, they contend, were about process and perhaps about the extent of the conspiracy, but not the existence of the conspiracy itself.⁴ However, none of the various interpretations of the Vesey plot have paid sufficient attention to the importance of precedent. Why did Charleston's elite come to respond in the way that they did? The situation facing Charleston's civic and legal authorities in 1822 was unprecedented in their city simply due to its scale. A conspiracy in 1797 involving “French negroes” from Saint Domingue was far smaller, resulting in just five arrests and three executions.⁵

Faced with a much larger conspiracy in 1822, those in Charleston looked not to dimly recalled events of 25 years ago, or indeed the larger but geographically distant plots in Virginia at the turn of the century, but to a much more recent and relevant precedent from Camden, South Carolina, just 6 years earlier.

Camden was a fairly unremarkable place. In a state that had only one significant port, Charleston, Camden was one of a number of smaller interior towns in South Carolina, including Greenville, Edgefield, and the state capital, Columbia. Although there was a small settlement by the late colonial period, and a significant battle was fought nearby during the Revolutionary War, the town only really began to grow into a significant regional center after the Revolution. Camden is located on the Wateree River, and since the Wateree fed the Santee River it had a direct link to the Atlantic Ocean (or, via the Santee Canal, to Charleston) despite being more than 100 miles inland. Between 1790 and 1820 the demography and economy of the central parts of South Carolina were totally transformed. Existing South Carolina residents and new immigrants moved to the area, and cotton plantations soon proliferated. In 1800 the 4706 whites in Kershaw District, surrounding and encompassing the town of Camden, easily outnumbered the 2530 enslaved people, but by 1820 the 5628 whites had been overtaken by an enslaved population that now numbered 6692.⁶ It is not known how much of this increase was fueled by the internal movement of enslaved people from the Upper to the Lower South, and how much by importation from Africa during the period that South Carolina re-opened the transatlantic trade, but it remains the case that Camden was located in a region undergoing rapid and dynamic change.⁷

The plot

In the middle of June 1816 Scipio, “a favorite and confidential slave” of James Chestnut, owner of the Mulberry plantation just south of Camden and aide-de-camp to the Governor, reported that “propositions of a dangerous character had been made to him, in relation to a projected insurrection among the blacks.”⁸ We will never know why Scipio chose to betray the Camden plotters; it might simply have been that he feared the consequences of being linked to such a plot if it failed. Self-interest might also have played a part. Scipio’s position was better than many others; he was a skilled mason and would have been able to work on hire with the opportunity to earn extra money for himself. Moreover, according to one report, he “has always supported a good character, and been for a course of years entrusted with the care of a portion of his master’s property.”⁹ He had more to lose than most from a failed plot.

After consulting with the Governor, James Chestnut embarked on a bold strategy. Rather than immediately seize those implicated, he persuaded Scipio to integrate himself into the plotters’ inner circle and pass on every detail of the plot. Two weeks later, on 1 July, 17 ringleaders were arrested simultaneously as they worked in the fields by co-ordinated parties of white men.¹⁰ The following day the Camden Town Council interrogated those arrested and, according to the *Camden Gazette*, established that

their intention was to have fired one end of the town, distant from the Arsenal, in order to draw attention of the public from that quarter where their hopes were centered. After

possessing themselves of arms and ammunition, the reader can imagine the course that would have been pursued.¹¹

With a swiftness characteristic of justice for enslaved people, the first trials before a court of Justices and Freeholders began on Wednesday, 3 July and continued until 17 July.

Scipio was arrested along with everyone else on 1 July 1816 since to exempt him would have been to confirm him as the informant. The Town Council did not interview him alongside the others, as there was no need, and the court used him relatively sparingly – he testified in just 3 of the 10 trials, the same number as Isaac, who was convicted and executed, and his testimony was heard by the accused.¹² Scipio was clearly aware how his actions would be seen among the enslaved since he “requested his master, when he told him, never to tell his name – he said he did not wish to leave this country, and he knew the negroes would not let him live here.”¹³ Governor David Williams recognized “that but for the loyalty of the servant mentioned, much injury would have been sustained, prior to the final destruction of those who so rashly plunged themselves into ruin,” recommending to the state legislature that they emancipate Scipio, since “short of his freedom, his reward will not be ample.”¹⁴ In saving the residents of Camden from “massacre and conflagration” this man had, Williams stated, “a strong claim on your generosity.” James Chestnut subsequently received \$1100 from the state for Scipio’s freedom and Scipio himself received an annual \$50 pension from the state while continuing to reside on the Chestnut plantation as a secret freeman.¹⁵

The trials

The 1740 “Act for the Better Ordering and Governing Negroes” set out the procedure to be followed: two justices were appointed who then selected up to five freeholders to join them to hear the case against each arrested man. In Camden the justices were Thomas Salmond, a clerk of the court, and John Kershaw, a judge of the county court. The five freeholders were wealthy landholders in the district, some of whom were neighbors of those whose slaves were accused of involvement.¹⁶ The justices both had legal experience, but perhaps even more significant was the fact that Joseph Brevard served as one of the freeholders. He had only recently stepped down after a 14-year term on the state Supreme Court, and in 1814 he had published a 3-volume digest of all South Carolina’s laws.¹⁷ Taken together, the court had a vast amount of judicial experience.

Trials were heard individually but in batches: Jack, Cameron, March and Isaac each had the case against them presented on 3 July, the verdict pronounced on 4 July and the sentence handed down on 5 July, which was carried out hours later. The authorities in Camden evidently wanted to believe that their judicial process was fair, following the proper legal process and of course in Brevard they had an expert to consult if they were in any doubt.¹⁸ Each prisoner had a trial, no one was lynched or summarily executed, and, according to Judge Henry Desaussure, “they were told they had a right to examine witnesses, + instructed in their rights, to a full defence.”¹⁹ Arrest, interrogation and trial did not automatically lead to conviction. Seven of those arrested were released without a trial, two were tried but acquitted, and two were convicted but not executed. Evidently there was at least some standard of proof required, even if the nature of that standard is not entirely clear from the surviving records.²⁰ Each of the six executed men in Camden attended his own trial and had at least three prosecution witnesses testify against him.

Stephen, who was convicted solely on the testimony of Scipio, was the only defendant to produce his own witness to testify on his behalf. The court decided to pardon him on the gallows, though only after “all the ceremonies of execution have been made.”²¹ Even the method of execution (hanging) used in Camden was considered to be swift and merciful, unlike burning, which was still in use in South Carolina as late as 1820.²² According to one local resident, the condemned men “expressed themselves surprised with the mild and humane manner of the proceedings instituted against them and fully acknowledged that they had anticipated immediate death in case of a discovery.”²³

The trial record also confirms that the plotters named names. Each of the 10 cases that came to trial featured enslaved witnesses for the prosecution. March, named by three slaves as one of the ringleaders, testified against two other people; Isaac was a witness against three other people, and he and Spottswood testified against each other. Cameron, Jack, and Ned alone gave no testimony against a fellow convicted prisoner. What is not clear is the level of coercion exerted on the prisoners. Local resident Francis Deliesseine put the words “mild and humane” in the mouths of the condemned to describe their treatment, but Rachel Blanding, sister-in-law of the Camden Town Council Intendent Abram Blanding, who led the interrogation of the plotters, heard differently: “Our Jail is filled with Negroes they are stre[t]ched on their Backs on the bare floor and scarcely move their heads but have a strong guard placed over them.”²⁴ Blanding’s observation might simply indicate that the prisoners were chained up and under guard. But it also might indicate the use of a form of torture to induce confessions and the naming of co-conspirators.

Four separate sources agree that those convicted in Camden freely confessed to their crimes and declined to shy away from the inevitable consequences. The *Camden Gazette* reported that “upon trial every one who was most deeply implicated manifested the greatest apparent innocence, but upon conviction acknowledged the correctness of the court’s decision; nor did they evince the smallest compunction for having conceived and matured the design.”²⁵ Judge Henry Desaussure, in nearby Columbia, told his brother-in-law that the chief plotters “did not deny their guilt”; indeed “they pleaded guilty & gloried in their plan.”²⁶ Desaussure even claimed that the executed men “met death with the heroism of Spartans,” refusing to implicate others in the plot.²⁷ Rachel Blanding agreed: “two or three confessed the fact and died like heroes they said.”²⁸ By 1822 the confessions of the convicted men had been further embellished. Francis Deliesseine recalled that “they all confessed their crimes, and the most intelligent of them acknowledged that they had no causes of complaint against their individual masters, and advised their surviving brethren of the futility of any further attempt.”²⁹

The surviving trial records contain nothing approaching a confession from any of the men. In every single Camden trial the prisoner’s plea was recorded as “not guilty.” Indeed, a guilty plea would have obviated the need for testimony, yet witnesses are listed for each trial, although not their actual evidence. The record of the town council’s investigation on 2 July concords with the official trial record. Of the six men executed, four flatly denied knowledge of any plot. Jack said “he never heard anything about a rising”; Cameron denied “that any person ever talked with them about any scheme of rising”; Ned “never had any information from any one respecting a rise of the black[s]”; March “never heard any thing about a rising of the negroes against whites until now.” Of the remaining two, Isaac stated that “he never engaged in any plan for rising” but admitted

that “it has been mentioned to him by others. . . . I thought it would be a good scheme if they could get through with it, but that negroes were so deceitful that it would not do.” The plot’s betrayal by Scipio proves that he was right. Spottswood had also heard of the plan but did not recall whether he “agreed to join or not.”³⁰ At most, the testimonies of Isaac and Spottswood demonstrated the existence of the plot, but they are clearly not confessions of guilt.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation for the divergence in the sources is that those condemned in Camden only confessed after the trials, perhaps to ministers who visited them in prison. The court in Camden ordered that Big Frank, convicted after testimony from three enslaved and five white people, be returned to jail, but stated that “any clergyman may be allowed to visit him.”³¹ No record exists of what Frank might have said to a clergyman, but nine days later the court reconvened to hear testimony from five further witnesses, some of whom testified on his behalf, and instead of being executed he was ordered to “suffer solitary confinement in irons” for a year unless his owner removed him from the United States.³² This might explain why the extant Camden trial records do not mention confessions, since they were made after trials were over. In the absence of trial testimony, the words of Blanding, Desaussure, and Delieesseline are the perhaps nearest we have to what the condemned actually said in Camden. Confessions by the guilty were important since they reaffirmed the legitimacy of the legal process, quashing any lingering doubts that the innocent might be executed.³³

The whites who reflected on this event clearly wished to convey the message that these were “fair trials,” involving a dispassionate examination of facts, not a hysterical over-reaction. The whole process, of course, remained stacked against black defendants, with cases being determined entirely by seven white men. But by the end of the process, authorities in Camden were confident that “the very judicious proceedings of the court has elicited much truth upon the subject.”³⁴

Reporting the plot

While it would be easy to dismiss the Camden plot as a small-scale event in a minor South Carolina town with little wider importance, the manner in which it was uncovered, prosecuted, considered, and reflected upon clearly set both the tone and the wider context for how the public in general, and the justices and freeholders who managed the trial process in Charleston in particular, responded to the Vesey conspiracy just six years later. For one thing, South Carolinians knew about what happened in Camden, as the conspiracy was reported on, in some depth, by the local newspaper, the *Camden Gazette*, over three weekly issues. On 4 July the *Gazette* reported the arrest of “15 or 20” plotters and briefly summarized the plot.³⁵ A week later it noted that the “mediated insurrection” had been “happily arrested” and five ringleaders had already been executed. Further details of the plot and its suppression were provided to readers, as well as an editorial on the role of religion in fostering the rebellion.³⁶ In its initial account of the plot the *Camden Gazette* had been quick to record its shock that “those who were the most active in this conspiracy occupied a respectable stand in one of our churches. Several were professors and one a class leader,” though in the next issue it clarified that “we are authorised to state that those who were professors of religion did not belong exclusively to one church.”³⁷ The *Camden Gazette* subsequently urged a fundamental

reconsideration of the evangelization of the enslaved. "For one hundred and fifty years," the *Gazette* recalled, Christian South Carolinians had displayed "laudable zeal for the reformation of that class of the human family." The insurmountable problem, however, was that it had proved impossible to separate "the sacred principles of our religion, without enlightening the savage mind." The "dawn of knowledge" brought about by Christian teachings was bound to foster a "spirit of liberty" that led directly to the recent events in Camden. Moreover, Christian teachings had done little, in the *Gazette's* opinion, to prevent "chicanery, debauchery, incest, and theft." The policy of evangelism had proved "destructive to happiness, and incompatible with our interests," and the only solution, the *Gazette* argued, was to "receive them no longer into fellowship."³⁸

There were three churches in Camden in 1816, a Presbyterian church that pre-dated the Revolution, a Methodist church completed in 1804, and a Baptist church completed in 1809. Enslaved people attended each church but, like their brothers and sisters across the South, they had a clear preference for the more evangelical churches. Evangelicals spread a message of spiritual equality that was particularly attractive to enslaved people, and Old Testament stories of the oppressed rising up against the powerful clearly resonated.³⁹ In Camden Methodist preachers made a particular effort to evangelize the enslaved population, and as a result reported more than 500 black congregants by 1812.⁴⁰ Some of the Camden plotters apparently acknowledged the spiritual debt they owed to religious whites, proposing to spare an "Old Gentleman who is a preacher, he never owned a Slave and has devoted much of his Time to preaching to them on the plantations."⁴¹ From a white perspective, however, evangelical religion had only functioned to radicalize the enslaved. Rachel Blanding reported that

one of them who was a professor of religion said he had only one sin to answer for and that was he had sat down to the communion Table with the White people when he knew he was going to cut their Throats as soon as convenient.⁴²

Evangelical religion not only provided theological justification and encouragement to those plotting an uprising, it also facilitated the dissemination of information about the plot itself. Religion was often associated with literacy as evangelical owners, preachers, and missionaries, keen to encourage Bible study, unintentionally imparted this crucial skill. One resident of Camden in 1816 later recalled that "two brothers engaged in this rebellion could read and write."⁴³ Literate slaves were able to communicate more freely with each other and write passes to allow themselves and others to travel more freely, as well as read newspapers. Religious gatherings also became one of the few spaces in which comparatively large numbers of enslaved people from different households could meet together with a degree of white tolerance.

By printing a detailed account of the plot, the *Camden Gazette* began a crucial process of information dissemination. Issues of the newspaper were exchanged with those emanating from other towns, and so newspaper editors elsewhere would have read about the plot and then made a decision about whether to include this news in their papers.⁴⁴ In Virginia, the *American Beacon* echoed the *Camden Gazette* in highlighting the critical role of religion in the conspiracy. It was the "delusive spirit" of religious fervor, the *Beacon* thought, that led the Camden plotters "to conspire for purposes the most ungrateful, the most revengeful, the most cruel and diabolical the mind of any human creature is capable of conceiving." Gatherings for "the pretended purpose of hearing the Gospel

expounded by one of their own color" were, the paper opined, merely places for "maturing some dark enterprise."⁴⁵ Since slave rebellions were relatively uncommon in the U.S., even an aborted plot merited mention, and several Northern newspapers reprinted the *Camden Gazette's* initial report verbatim.⁴⁶

Gauging how much information about the plot circulated within South Carolina is not straightforward. Issues of the *Camden Gazette* would surely have been dispatched to Charleston, Columbia, and other towns, but newspaper survival is patchy and some newspapers that perhaps reported on the plot are no longer extant. A few newspapers were conspicuously silent on the matter; the *Charleston Times* and the *Charleston City Gazette*, for example, never mentioned it, though the *Times* did print a letter on 17 July from "HTF" warning against the dangers of enslaved people meeting at night for religious purposes that was quite possibly triggered by news of the plot in Camden. According to "HTF," preaching "by an ignorant and (too frequently) vicious person of their own color ... may be attended with many evils." Religious "Passion," he warned "like a hidden fire, needs but a small breeze to bid it blaze" and unchecked risked becoming "too formidable."⁴⁷ Other editors were more forthcoming to their readers. The *Columbia Telescope* reprinted the *Camden Gazette's* account in its entirety, perhaps because Camden was located just 40 miles away from Columbia, with a direct road linking the towns. The *Southern Patriot*, published in Charleston, declined to reprint a long account, but reported it had "seen a letter [about] this atrocious attempt." Worried that "there are probably a number concerned, who had not been arrested" it urged its readers that "VIGILANCE should be the watchword."⁴⁸

Aside from the press, there were other ways in which news about the Camden plot traveled. As the *Southern Patriot* mentioned, letters between individuals told of events in Camden. The report that circulated most widely among the press was a first-hand account written by Rachel Blanding to her cousin in Philadelphia. Blanding reported that the plot had been more than six months in the planning, and that the leaders had "tried to engage all for a great distance round." The plan was to start fires before raiding the arsenal for weapons. Once armed, they would have "proceeded to murder the men but the women they intended to have reserved for their own purposes this is their own confession." Clearly terrified at the prospect of a race war in which she would be a target, Blanding told her cousin that "I think it is Time for us to leave a Country that we cannot go to bed in in safety."⁴⁹ Her account betrays her deep-seated fear that enslaved people were constantly plotting and, once possessing the means to do so would not hesitate to strike down those who enslaved them. Her letter was published in a Philadelphia newspaper on 16 July and subsequently reprinted in numerous other titles, but with two important changes.⁵⁰ All the newspapers titled it "Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Camden, S.C. to his friend in Philadelphia," disguising the fact that it was written by a woman to her kinswoman. Secondly, one crucial sentence in the manuscript letter – "the Doctor was out on Guard last night I was afraid to stay at home and staid with sister" – was omitted from the printed version, perhaps because it expressed white fear a little too strongly. The rumor that the plot entailed "indiscriminate death to one sex, while to the other it promised a fate more loathsome, more cruel than then thousand deaths" clearly resonated in the press, and Blanding's letter seems to have been the principal source.⁵¹ As Jason Sharples has recently pointed out, these deep-seated racially sexualized fears emerged whenever whites felt

their dominant position under threat, and were commonplace in the eighteenth century in response to real and rumored insurrections.⁵² Six years later, responses among white women in Charleston strongly echoed those from Camden in 1816. Anna Hayes Johnson had heard that “the Men & Black Women were to have been indiscriminately murdered – & we poor devils were to have been reserved to fill their – Harams – horrible.”⁵³ Widow Mary Jones, just like Rachel Blanding, declared that “I shall never be able to bear the sight of a Negroe again & if I go (or live to go) to the Northward I never will have one about me.”⁵⁴ Camden is the most immediate example of such fears manifesting in South Carolina before the Vesey conspiracy.

Another first-hand account evidently came from Abram Blanding, Intendent of the town of Camden, who led the interrogation of those arrested. He corresponded with Judge Henry Desaussure in nearby Columbia, reassuring him that “there were no traces discoverable of any connection with other parts of the State.” It is highly likely that Blanding also wrote to his old friend David Williams, then nearing the end of his tenure as Governor of South Carolina.⁵⁵ Desaussure included a full account of the plot in a letter to his brother-in-law Timothy Ford in Charleston, and it is probable that news subsequently circulated in the city in Ford’s social circle. It is even possible that this was the letter to which the *Southern Patriot* referred.⁵⁶

Aside from the newspapers and letters circulating in July 1816, Governor Williams referred to the plot in detail in his annual message to both houses of the legislature in late November. His address was then printed in South Carolina newspapers, including the *City Gazette*, that had refrained from printing information about the plot in July.⁵⁷ Those reading these accounts would have absorbed several key messages. Firstly, the enslaved were to be suspected at all times, and never to be trusted. Plots could be festering anywhere. Secondly, religious slaves were to be watched particularly closely as they seemed to have imbibed unintended messages of equality and freedom from scripture that horrified whites. And thirdly, towns were, like churches, places in which plots could be easily disseminated. They tended to have the best transport connections to the wider rural community, and therefore could be at the heart of a slave plot because they facilitated interaction among enslaved people. Slave owners sent their slaves into town on errands or permitted them to travel there to worship or trade, where they mingled with the resident enslaved population. In Camden one focal point for meetings was Chapman Levy’s brickyard near the Columbia Canal, where one of the key ringleaders, March, worked, but it is clear from those arrested and interrogated that the plot encompassed plantations to the southeast, southwest and west of Camden itself. Three of those executed belonged to the Lang family, who owned plantations where the Wateree River was bisected by the main Camden-Columbia road.⁵⁸

Towns were also a crucial nexus for information more generally, about the state, the nation and the wider world. In 1822 some of those interrogated in Charleston mentioned the hope that Haitians would come to support the revolt.⁵⁹ The example of the Haitian Revolution and the independent black state that emerged from it resonated throughout the Atlantic World. But it was not the only example of black resistance of which enslaved people might have heard. It is entirely possible that literate enslaved people in Camden read, or heard, and were inspired by the numerous examples of enslaved resistance that littered the pages of the *Camden Gazette* in the period immediately preceding the planned revolt. In April 1816 the *Gazette* copied a report from a Rhode Island newspaper that claimed that a “large party of blacks” had succeeded in destroying Sierra Leone and

"had murdered nearly all the white inhabitants."⁶⁰ In May and June several reports were printed noting an uprising in Barbados that had "had succeeded in destroying thirteen estates" and spread to nearby St. Vincent, where it only been quelled with great loss of life.⁶¹ There was also a recent and even more local example of enslaved rebelliousness. In early 1815 a British fleet had cruised off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina, promising freedom to enslaved people who joined their cause. The British, including 200 soldiers from the 2nd West India Regiment, made up of men of African descent, occupied Cumberland Island in Georgia and captured the town of St. Mary's. More than a thousand enslaved people from the lowcountry had seized the chance to secure their freedom, leaving one slaveholder astonished at "the magical transformation of his own negroes, whom he left in the field but a few hours before, into regular soldiers, of good discipline and appearance."⁶² Isaac, one of those arrested in Camden, had served as a drummer in the militia unit commanded by his master and traveled to the lowcountry during that alarm, no doubt learning firsthand of the activities of the British in welcoming enslaved people into their forces.⁶³ As whites reflected on what might have caused enslaved people to plot an insurrection, they generally looked to these broad external influences. Henry Desaussure believed that the enslaved had

imbibed deeply the principle of liberty, & a contempt of death in pursuit of it. And this is the most dangerous state of mind for slaves. Doubtless the detection & punishment of the leaders, will repress it for a time, but I fear the spirit has sunk deep into the minds of these people.⁶⁴

It is far from clear, however, how far information about the Camden plot penetrated the black community in Charleston, and there is no direct evidence that ties the Vesey plotters to the Camden ones. The decision of the *Charleston Times* and the *Charleston City Gazette* to omit any reference to the events in Camden was surely an attempt to limit the easy transmission of information among the enslaved population. Vesey and fellow plotters Peter Poyas, and Monday Gell were all literate, and so it is certainly possible that they might have read about the Camden plot via the brief report in the *Southern Patriot* or the printed versions of the Governor's annual message.⁶⁵ Anna Hayes Johnson was told that Vesey "acknowledged that he had been nine years endeavouring to effect the diabolical scheme," and, if true, this means that the plot would already have been maturing slowly by 1816.⁶⁶ It has already been established that personal letters helped to disseminate news, and whispered conversations among whites were perhaps the most likely method of onward transmission, but such conversations could be overheard. The reported plan in 1822 to set fire to the town before commencing a general slaughter was an almost exact replica of the Camden plot, but this plan was far from being unique to Camden and was, in fact, common to many conspiracies in Anglophone colonies in the Americas in the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ One major innovation in 1822 was the plan to escape to Haiti in the aftermath. However, the final outcome intended by the Camden plotters was never mentioned beyond vague notions of wanting to "raise an army and fight the white people."⁶⁸

Importance of the legislature

Knowledge of the Camden plot confirmed to white South Carolinians that an undercurrent of enslaved rebelliousness lay bubbling just under the surface, fostered by outside agitators

and evangelical religion. This was fertile enough ground for the unfolding of events in Charleston in 1822, but the links between Camden and the Vesey plot are actually far more direct, and the key body is the state legislature. Eighteen white men from Charleston served in the legislature during the November–December 1816 session, 16 in the House of Representatives and 2 in the Senate. Several later played a part in dealing with the Vesey plot.⁶⁹ Not only was Governor Williams' annual message containing an outline of the plot read before both houses, but owners of men who were executed for their part in the plot presented legislators with claims for compensation that were referred to subcommittees of both houses.⁷⁰ One of the members of the claims committee of the House of Representatives was Lionel H. Kennedy, representing the parish of St. Michael and St. Philip in Charleston. As a member of this committee he would have read the petitions of people such as Camden resident Sarah Martin, who was seeking compensation for Ned, executed "for being concerned in the intended insurrection of the blacks."⁷¹ Six years later Kennedy was one of the presiding magistrates overseeing the trials of those accused of plotting a very similar uprising in Charleston. Presiding over the House of Representatives as Speaker in 1816 was Thomas Bennett, the future Governor of South Carolina during the Vesey plot. Indeed, one might draw a tentative thread between his detailed knowledge of the Camden plot and the involvement of several of his own enslaved house servants in the Vesey plot. It is certainly possible that Ned, Rolla, or Bateau overheard Bennett talking about Camden in 1816 and then passed that information into the wider enslaved community, using well-established enslaved communication networks.⁷² James R. Pringle, a member of the Senate in 1816, served as one of the freeholders in the first Vesey court in June 1822. Serving alongside him in the Senate, representing Kershaw District, was Chapman Levy, whose slave March was almost certainly the main ringleader of the Camden plot. It is not known whether the two men conversed on the subject, but it is hardly beyond the bounds of possibility. Robert Young Hayne, Joel Roberts Poinsett, and John Stevens Cogdell, all members of Charleston's delegation in the House of Representatives in 1816, were respectively a judge in the second Vesey court, a freeholder in the August Vesey court, and a city councilman in 1822. The significance of these hitherto overlooked links between men with a personal knowledge of the Camden plot and those who determined the fate of the Vesey plotters is that they had a clearly mapped-out path to follow. Indeed, the *Official Report* published by Lionel Kennedy and Thomas Parker, who presided over the Vesey court, confirmed that they had based the conduct of the 1822 trials on "precedent, on a former occasion, under similar circumstances, at Camden."⁷³ Kennedy and Parker also cited two other legal precedents pertaining to enslaved plots, Antigua in 1736 and New York in 1741, to justify their decision to hold the trials in secret. Yet it seems unlikely that, outside of legal circles, either of those eighteenth-century incidents would have loomed large in public memory, especially when compared to a very recent example from much closer to home.

When George approached Major John Wilson in Charleston in 1822, telling him of an extensive insurrection plot in the city, it conformed to a pattern established in Camden – that enslaved people were not necessarily that loyal to each other, and that "confidential" and "trusted" slaves should be believed. It was this voluntary approach, as James Spady has clearly explained, that made George's testimony so believable, but it also surely gained added credibility because another enslaved person had done exactly the same thing in Camden in 1816.⁷⁴ The lack of unity among enslaved people was therefore

something entirely to be expected. The Charleston courts placed considerable faith in information that implicated other people, and Michael Johnson made much of this tendency in his 2001 article, arguing that the Vesey plot was a result of fevered white imaginings, “pet” witnesses, tortured confessions, and finger-pointing.⁷⁵ An alternative viewpoint, however, would stress that the way the Vesey trials played out was entirely consistent with what had happened, admittedly on a much smaller scale, in Camden in 1816. Indeed, something that distinguishes both the Camden and the Vesey plots from some other conspiracies is that initially they were willingly betrayed without any coercion.

Knowing that evangelized slaves had been at the heart of the Camden plot in 1816 could easily have made residents in Charleston even more suspicious of the religious activities of their own black populace. John Sallaint has demonstrated that white violence and intimidation towards black Methodists in Charleston had flared up periodically from the 1780s over concerns about large gatherings of enslaved people. In 1817, less than a year after the Camden plot involving Christian slaves, a clear rupture between white and black Methodists in Charleston led to the formation of an African church with more than four thousand members.⁷⁶ Enslaved and free black people were now meeting with even less white oversight, and thus it is hardly surprising that suspicions grew about what they were being taught and what discussions were taking place. Those investigating the Vesey plot swiftly came to believe that the city’s African Church was a crucial nexus point. George, one of the first to bring the plot to the attention of whites, was a class leader there, while several of the key plotters were members of his class.⁷⁷ Vesey himself was deeply religious and seems to have imbibed from the scriptures the same message of freedom as those in Camden had in 1816.⁷⁸

Impact on the Vesey trials

The Camden trials taught those responding to the Vesey conspiracy a number of important lessons. Clearly, a trial process should be followed, one that gave at least a semblance of fairness and involved witnesses, prosecutors, and defenders. That was, after all, what state law demanded. Of course, it should always be remembered that enslaved people were valued as an asset by their owners, and the compensation provided by law by the state was not the true market value of the person executed. Owners, who formed the social and political elite, had a vested interest in ensuring that the innocent were not executed, and even the owners of condemned slaves needed a trial process in order to claim compensation from the state.⁷⁹ But while Lionel Kennedy and Thomas Parker might have declared in 1822 that they had followed legal principles established in Camden in 1816, Governor Thomas Bennett did not think that authorities in Charleston had adhered closely enough to the Camden precedent. On first hearing of the plot Bennett suggested to the City Council that they establish a “Court of Investigation [to] pursue fearlessly the mazes of the labyrinth.”⁸⁰ The Camden City Council had undertaken precisely this course of action before the commencement of the trials in 1816. Instead, the Charleston council proceeded immediately to the trial stage. More seriously, the court’s willingness to hear trial testimony not only with the public excluded but also without the defendant was, in Bennett’s view, “to be deeply lamented.” Kennedy and Parker claimed in justification of their actions that the Camden trials had also excluded the public, something that cannot be either confirmed or disproved from the surviving records.⁸¹ But the Camden trials had certainly permitted the defendants to be present

during testimony. Bennett's response to Vesey, like so many other Charlestonians, thus drew heavily on his knowledge of the events in Camden in the summer of 1816, and his criticisms largely related to instances in which the Charleston court departed from the Camden precedent. Had Lionel Kennedy, privy to the same information about Camden as Bennett, followed the procedural precedents to the letter, rather than simply in spirit, a large part of Bennett's criticism would have evaporated.

Incidentally, Bennett's other criticism in 1822, that the conspiracy was probably not as extensive as some feared, was also likely to have been based on his knowledge of the events in Camden. Bennett was dubious of claims that Vesey and the other ringleaders had recruited thousands of enslaved plantation workers for their uprising, since in his experience slave plots were likely to be much smaller in scale. The Camden plot had not resulted in hundreds of arrests, and, because whites could generally rely on the "treachery" of some of those involved who out of "fidelity and attachment" would betray any plot, something that had happened in both 1816 and 1822, "an extensive conspiracy cannot be matured in this state."⁸² Bennett did not doubt the existence of a conspiracy; he knew perfectly well that enslaved people had drawn on religious ideology before to orchestrate an insurrection plot. But he was doubtful about the extent to which such a plot might have spread beyond its Charleston core.

Those with knowledge of the Camden plot knew that protestations of innocence from the accused were to be expected at the trial stage and could be safely ignored. Post-conviction confessions would likely affirm the correctness of the process. Literate and religious slaves should be viewed with the greatest suspicion, as they were likely to have been at the very heart of any plot. The roots of insurrection should be looked for in preachers who disseminated ideas of natural rights and higher authorities. Finally, those arrested and accused would quite probably provide evidence against each other, either willingly or via coercion. This testimony should be presumed to be credible in the absence of any clear proof to the contrary, and information volunteered from particularly trusted slaves should be acted upon. Those providing voluntary information should be appropriately rewarded. Scipio had been given his freedom and a \$50 annual pension in 1816. In 1822 Peter Prioleau and George Wilson received exactly the same reward from the state legislature for their part in betraying the Vesey plot.⁸³

Conclusion

The discovery of clear links between the events in Camden in 1816 and those in Charleston in 1822 weakens the argument that those investigating and prosecuting the Vesey plotters reacted in a panic, arresting and executing all and sundry. Instead, they acted rationally based on the legal and procedural precedents established six years earlier of which many had first-hand knowledge of. The Camden plot foreshadowed the Vesey conspiracy because it primed the authorities in Charleston to be wary and on their guard for a plot of a similar nature and provided them with a framework that shaped their response. When information was volunteered by someone who claimed first-hand knowledge of an insurrection plot among enslaved people in Charleston in 1822, it was instantly more credible because the enslaved were acting exactly how white authorities knew they had acted in the past. If we suppose, for a moment, that the Camden plot had never existed, then would the information volunteered have been so readily believed? Would

the cascade of arrests, interrogations, and trials have happened either at all, or so quickly and with the same consequences? It is, of course, impossible to know for certain, but it is clear that the Camden plot weighed heavily on the memory those who shaped the course of events in Charleston in the summer of 1822.

Notes

1. Among the notable contributions to the historiography of the Vesey conspiracy are Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*; Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators"; Johnson, "The Making of a Slave Conspiracy"; Egerton and Paquette, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*; and Paquette and Egerton, "Of Facts and Fables."
2. Wade, "The Vesey Plot"; and Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," 935–8.
3. *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 540–1.
4. Paquette and Egerton, "Of Facts and Fables," 17.
5. For details of the 1797 conspiracy see *City Gazette*, November 22, 23 and 28, 1797.
6. Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 19.
7. On the re-opening of the transatlantic trade between 1803 and 1808 and the importation of c.70,000 Africans into South Carolina see McMillin, *The Final Victims*, 19–27; and Shugerman, "The Louisiana Purchase," 280.
8. Message of the Governor, *City Gazette*, December 6, 1816.
9. Message of the Governor, *City Gazette*, December 6, 1816; and Stern, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War Epic*, 213.
10. *A Refutation of the Calumnies*, 76.
11. *Camden Gazette*, July 4, 1816.
12. Paquette and Egerton, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 159.
13. "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Camden, S.C. to His Friend in Philadelphia, Dated July 4, 1816." *National Advocate* (N.Y.) July 19, 1816.
14. Message of the Governor, *City Gazette*, December 6, 1816.
15. Henry, "The Police Control of Slaves in South Carolina," 152.
16. For Salmond, see his obituary *The South-Carolinian*, July 6, 1854; for Kershaw, see Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 381. The freeholders were Benjamin Bynum (formerly Sheriff of Kershaw District), Joseph Brevard (formerly judge of the South Carolina Supreme Court); Burwell Boykin (previously a state legislator), Thomas Whitaker, and Benjamin Carter (both planters). See Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 321–6; 347–8, 360–1, 397.
17. Brevard, *An Alphabetical Digest of the Public Statutes*.
18. The procedure for the trials of enslaved people was set out in Article 9 of the 1740 Negro Act. The law is included in Paquette and Egerton, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 113–14.
19. Henry W. Desaussure to Timothy Ford, July 9, 1816, Timothy Ford Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.
20. Freehling, "Denmark Vesey's Antipaternalist Reality," 54–5.
21. Trial Record, Kershaw County, July 3–17, 1816, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.
22. For the execution of Sam by burning for the murder of his master in Edgefield District, see *Charleston Courier*, February 7, 1820.
23. *A Refutation of the Calumnies*, 76.
24. Rachel Blanding (Camden, SC) to Hannah Lewis (Philadelphia), July 4, 1816, William Blanding Papers, South Caroliniana Library.
25. *Camden Gazette*, July 11, 1816.
26. Desaussure to Ford, July 9, 1816.
27. Desaussure to Ford, July 9, 1816. "The chiefs disdained to implicate others – the head man avowed his guilt, + gloried in it, but said nothing not even quartering should induce him to inculpate others."
28. Blanding to Lewis, July 25, 1816.

29. *A Refutation of the Calumnies*, 76.
30. James Spady observes that several of those who were interrogated during the Vesey trials accepted they had heard of the plot, but had declined to join it. Spady, "Belonging and Alienation," 43.
31. Paquette and Egerton note that this is exactly what occurred in Charleston in 1822. Paquette and Egerton, "Of Facts and Fables," 8–48.
32. Trial Record, Kershaw County, MS, July 3–17, 1816 (South Caroliniana Library).
33. Post-trial confessions (often made on the scaffold) were often published in the press, or in pamphlet form, and nearly always involved the condemned accepting the fairness of their treatment, and often a warning to others not to follow the path that had led to their deaths. See Carlton, "The Rhetoric of Death," 66–79.
34. *Camden Gazette*, July 11, 1816.
35. *Camden Gazette*, July 4, 1816.
36. *Camden Gazette*, July 11, 1816.
37. *Camden Gazette*, July 4 and 11, 1816; Ford, *Deliver us from Evil*, 176–9.
38. *Camden Gazette*, July 11, 1816.
39. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 130–43; Egerton, *He Shall Go out Free*, 104–5; Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, 188–94; and Gallay, "Planters and Slaves in the Great Awakening," 19–36.
40. Inabinet, *Lyttleton Street United Methodist Church*, 17, 25.
41. Blanding to Lewis, July 4, 1816.
42. Rachel Blanding (Camden, SC) to Hannah Lewis (Philadelphia), July 25, 1816, William Blanding Papers, South Caroliniana Library.
43. *A Refutation of the Calumnies*, 76.
44. On the role of printing and reprinting materials in this manner see Beals, "The Role of the Sydney Gazette," 149–50; idem, "Transnational Exchanges," 246; and McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, 30. See also Sharples, *The World That Fear Made*, 62.
45. *American Beacon*, July 30, 1816.
46. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, July 19 and *New York Commercial Advertiser*, July 20, *New York Spectator* and *Boston Recorder*, July 24, *New York Courier*, July 25, *Eastern Argus* (Portland Maine) July 31, 1816.
47. *Charleston Times*, July 17, 1816. In June and July 1822 the Charleston papers were similarly silent on the unfolding Vesey conspiracy, aside from a few oblique references.
48. *Columbia Telescope*, July 19, 1816; *Southern Patriot*, July 8 and 10, 1816.
49. Blanding to Lewis, July 4, 1816.
50. *New York Commercial Advertiser*, *New York Evening Post* both July 18; *National Advocate* (New York) and *Boston Daily Advertiser* both July 19, 1816 [Boston paper bylines it Philadelphia July 16], *The Reportory* (Boston) July 20, *Independent Chronicle*, July 22, *Connecticut Currant*, July 23.
51. *American Beacon* (Norfolk VA) July 30, 1816.
52. Sharples, *The World That Fear Made*, 1–18, 99–100; see also Jordan, *White over Black*, 150–4 and Egerton, *He Shall Go out Free*, 167–8.
53. Egerton and Paquette, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 368.
54. Mary Beach to Elizabeth Gilchrist, July 5, 1822, in Egerton and Paquette, *The Denmark Vesey affair*, 376.
55. Blanding and Williams had been roommates at Brown University. Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 100.
56. Desaussure to Ford, July 9, 1816. Desaussure and Ford and previously been partners in a legal practice in Charleston.
57. *City Gazette*, December 6, 1816. It was also printed in the *Camden Gazette*, December 5, 1816 and the *Columbia Telescope*, December 3, 1816.
58. Isaac and Cameron were owned by Sarah Lang, Jack by her son Thomas Lang. Locations of the plantations are marked on the Mills Map of Kershaw District (1825). <http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps860034-23867.html>.

59. Spady, "Power and Confession," 292, 303.
60. *Camden Gazette*, April 25, 1816. This report originally appeared in the *Newport Mercury*, March 23, 1816 and featured in the press in nearly every state. The *London Times*, however, noted that "the danger has been exaggerated ... some ill-disposed individuals had thrown the place into confusion. It was found necessary to read the riot act, and to call out the troops, and these energetic measures had defeated the plans of the turbulent" (*Times*, May 7, 1816).
61. *Camden Gazette*, May 30, 1816, June 20, 1816.
62. Kingsley, *A Treatise on the Patriarchal or Co-operative System*, 11.
63. Inabinet, "The July Fourth Incident," 218. On the occupation of Cumberland Island, see Caulfield, *One Hundred Years' History of the 2nd Batt*, 34; Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War*, clxxix; and Bullard, *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island*, 46. On the similar impact of British forces in Virginia during 1813 and 1814, see Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 200–13; 245–349; and Millett, "Slavery and the War of 1812," 184–205.
64. Desaussure to Ford, July 9, 1816.
65. On literacy see, for example, the complaint made by the Charleston Grand Jury in 1820 about "missionary school-masters" teaching slaves to read. Egerton and Paquette, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 56. A similar link was observed during the Gabriel Prosser plot in Virginia in 1800, see Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, 72–82.
66. Egerton and Paquette, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 398.
67. Jason Sharples argues that the commonality between slave plots is a result of the easy circulation of information among British colonies, the leading questions asked by investigators, and the widespread use of torture. Sharples, *The World That Fear Made*, 1–18, 99–100; The 1797 plotter in Charleston also intended "to fire the city" (*City Gazette*, November 22, 1797).
68. Camden Town Council investigation 1816, Kershaw District, Magistrates and Freeholders Records, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, and Free Carolina [SCDAH]. Testimonies of Sam "raise an army and fight the white people"; Jim "raise [sic] against the white people"; Tom "fight this country"; Old Jack "rise and take country," Spotswood "go and fight the white people."
69. *Biographical Directory of the Senate of the State of South Carolina 1776–1964*, 36; *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, 294–5.
70. See Senate Journal 1816, 117 and House of Representatives Journal 1816, 26, 85, 92. SCDAH.
71. Petition of Sarah Martin, Petitions to the General Assembly (S165015), SCDAH.
72. Spady, "Belonging and Alienation," 41–2; and Kaye, *Joining Places*, 24.
73. Paquette and Egerton, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 160.
74. Spady, "Power and Confession," 290–1.
75. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," 915–976; and Sharples, *The World That Fear Made*, 102.
76. Egerton and Paquette, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 21–4; and Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 130–3. John Saillant points out that despite, being generally referred to by historians as an African Methodist Episcopal church, at the time it was simply termed "The African Church." While organised on Methodist lines, he argues, it was not formally linked to the African Methodist Episcopal Church based in Philadelphia. Saillant, "Before 1822."
77. Spady, "Power and Confession," 299; and Egerton, *He Shall Go out Free*, 105–25.
78. Egerton uses the trial testimony to argue that Vesey became a Methodist class leader who promoted the vengeful and angry Deity of the Old Testament as the most suitable role model for enslaved people. Egerton, *He Shall Go out Free*, 112–13. Michael Johnson, discounting most of the testimony as coerced and unreliable, points out that Vesey was actually a full communicant at the Second Presbyterian Church. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey's Church," 805–48. That Vesey was deeply religious is not in doubt. Egerton, *He Shall Go out Free*, 41.
79. For examples of failed petitions for compensation when slaves had been killed by patrols or the militia, and not after a trial, see Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 80–6.
80. Paquette and Egerton, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 540.
81. *Ibid.*, 540, 159.

82. Governor Bennett's Circular Letter, August 10, 1822, in Paquette and Egerton, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 470.
83. Paquette and Egerton, *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 626–7.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Tim Lockley is professor of North American history at the University of Warwick.

Bibliography

- Beals, M. H. "The Role of the Sydney Gazette in the Creation of Australia in the Scottish Public Sphere." In *Historical Networks in the Book Trade*, edited by John Hinks and Catherine Feely, 148–170. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Beals, M. H. "Transnational Exchanges." In *Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Newspaper Press, Volume 2: Expansion and Evolution, 1800–1900*, edited by David Finkelstein, 240–260. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
- Biographical Directory of the Senate of the State of South Carolina 1776–1964*. Columbia: SCDAA, 1964.
- Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974.
- Bevard, Joseph. *An Alphabetical Digest of the Public Statutes of South Carolina*. 3 vols. Charleston: John Hoff, 1814.
- Bullard, Mary R. *Robert Stafford of Cumberland Island: Growth of a Planter*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995.
- Carlton, Charles. "The Rhetoric of Death: Scaffold Confessions in Early Modern England." *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 49, no. 1 (1983): 66–79.
- Caulfield, James E. *One Hundred Years' History of the 2nd Batt. West India Regiment*. London: Forster Groom, 1899.
- Egerton, Douglas R. *He Shall Go out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey*. 2nd ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- Egerton, Douglas R., and Robert L. Paquette. *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017.
- Ford, Lacy K. *Deliver us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Freehling, William W. *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Gallay, Alan. "Planters and Slaves in the Great Awakening." In *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740–1870*, edited by John B. Boles, 19–36. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988.
- Henry, H. M. "The Police Control of Slaves in South Carolina." PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1914.
- Inabinet, Glen. "'The July Fourth Incident' of 1816: An Insurrection Plotted by Slaves in Camden, South Carolina." In *South Carolina Legal History: Proceedings of the Reynolds Conference*, University of South Carolina, December 2–3, 1977, edited by Herbert A. Johnson, 209–221. Columbia, SC: USC Southern Studies Program, 1980.
- Inabinet, Joan A. *Lyttleton Street United Methodist Church: A History*. Camden, SC: Pine Tree, 2003.
- Johnson, Michael P. "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators." *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001): 915–976.

- Johnson, Michael P. "The Making of a Slave Conspiracy: Forum." *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (2002): 137–192.
- Johnson, Michael P. "Denmark Vesey's Church." *Journal of Southern History* 86 (2020): 805–848.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812*. 2nd ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Kaye, Anthony. *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Kingsley, Zephaniah. *A Treatise on the Patriarchal or Co-operative System of Slavery*. np, 1829.
- Kirkland, Thomas J., and Robert M. Kennedy. *Historic Camden, Part 2: Nineteenth Century*. Columbia, SC: State, 1926.
- Latour, A. Lacarriere. *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814–15*. Philadelphia: John Conrad, 1816.
- Lockley, Tim. *Maroon Communities in South Carolina*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009.
- Loveland, Anne C. *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800–1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.
- McGill, Meredith L. *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- McMillin, J. A. *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783–1810*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.
- Millett, Nathaniel. "Slavery and the War of 1812." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 71 (2012): 184–205.
- Mood, F. A. *Methodism in Charleston: A Narrative of the Chief Events Relating to the Rise and Progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C.* Nashville: E. Stevenson and J.E. Evans, 1856.
- Paquette, Robert L., and Douglas R. Egerton. "Of Facts and Fables: New Light on the Denmark Vesey Affair." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 105 (2004): 8–48.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- A Refutation of the Calumnies Circulated Against the Southern and Western States*. Charleston: A E Miller, 1822.
- Saillant, John W. "Before 1822: Anti-Black Attacks on Charleston Methodist Churches from 1786 to Denmark Vesey's Execution." *Common-place* 16, no. 2 (Winter 2016). <http://commonplace.online/article/before-1822/>.
- Sharples, Jason T. *The World That Fear Made: Slave Revolts and Conspiracy Scares in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.
- Shugerman, J. H. "The Louisiana Purchase and South Carolina's Reopening of the Slave Trade in 1803." *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (2002): 263–290.
- Sidbury, James. *Ploughshares into Swords, Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Spady, James O'Neil. "Belonging and Alienation: Gullah Jack and Some Maroon Dimensions of the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy." In *Maroons and the Marooned*, edited by Joseph Kelly and Richard Bodek, 30–54. Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2020.
- Spady, James O'Neil. "Power and Confession: On the Credibility of the Earliest Reports of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy." *William and Mary Quarterly* 68 (April 2011): 287–304.
- Stern, Julia A. *Mary Chestnut's Civil War Epic*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2010.
- Taylor, Alan. *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772–1832*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2013.
- Wade, Richard C. "The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration." *Journal of Southern History* 30 (1964): 143–161.