THE MAROON OBSERVER

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE JAMAICAN MAROONS

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Charles Town Maroons in Touch with their Heritage

A Maroon museum, the first of its kind, has been built in Charles Town bringing together the community and offering a cultural experience for visitors.

SEE MORE ON PAGES 2 & 3

Trelawny Town Maroons Exhiled to Canada then Africa: Garvey's Dream?

After being tricked by the British, the Trelawny Town Maroons were sent to Canada then Sierra Leone. Did this accomplish what Marcus Garvey intended in his "Back to Africa" movement?

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What do Jamaicans know about Maroons?

Surprisingly, not as much as you would think. Check out the top 3 lists of things Jamaicans know about the Maroons and things misunderstood about the Maroons.

SEE MORE ON PAGE 9

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MAROONS CELEBRATE 267 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

On January 6, 2005, the Accompong Maroons hosted the Annual Accompong Maroon Festival, commemorating the 267th year of independence from Britain. The theme of this year's festival was "Keeping Maroon Heritage and Culture Alive." The festivities started at 10:00 a.m. with a traditional ceremony at the Kindah tree, reserved for Maroons only as a celebration of Cudjoe's birthday and an honoring of the ancestors. A large amount of food was roasted and dedicated to Cudjoe and all those before them. The night before the festival there were also a number of ceremonies for Maroons only to reconnect with the ancestral spirits through music, dance, and spiritual possession. The events of the night before are very important for those taking part, as on the actual day of the festival, the spirits are very weary to become incarnate in the bodies of Maroon participants because too many outsiders are seen as potential enemies.[1] And so, it is the events taking place the night before that hold the most importance for Maroons.

The actual day of the festival is more for administrative and economic reasons. In an interview with Colonel Cawley in 1988, he said, "The celebration unites the Maroons and keeps them aware of what is happening and where the Maroons are going today."[2] This was partially accomplished through the program that took place at Cudjoe's Monument in the afternoon. As tradition would have, the program began with the blowing of the abeng and a prayer. The next three hours gave each Maroon town on the island an opportunity to bring greetings and do a cultural presentation. The only group unable to attend was Scotts Hall, but Charles Town, Moore Town, and Accompong Town were all represented, performing traditional dance, song and drumming.

The festival brought in many visitors, both from "foreign" and domestically, Maroons and non-Maroons alike, numbering somewhere around 14,000. The festival provides that great economic opportunity for the Maroon towns from both the guests and from the government. The Jamaican government is hoped and expected to offer gifts of political concessions and public funds.[3] This year, more action is being taken to make Accompong a more key tourist location with the help of the government. The Minister of Tourism and Industry was brought in as the guest speaker to the festival to address the desire by Colonel Peddie to set up an Accompong Maroon Foundation, which would "enable the village to acquire the much-needed funding necessary for the development of the community as a major tourist destination."[4] The community also hopes to increase cultural awareness and knowledge of the Maroons, creating educational tours aimed at primary and secondary schools, which indirectly further increases the draw to the area.[5]

Doniesha Prendergast, Bob Marley's granddaughter, talks with Colonel Sidney Peddie next to Cudjoe's Monument

With much energy, motivation and good leadership, it will be interesting to see how the Jamaican Maroon communities, in conjunction with the government, continue to develop over the next few years.

Led by an abeng player, the Maroons march back to Cudjoe's Monument in the center of town after their traditional ceremony in "Old Town"

Maroon Towns Today: Special Feature

Charles Town

When initially beginning my research on the Maroons, two Jamaican friends told me that they were part Maroon. As if that was not enough to excite me, I then came to find out that one of their uncles is currently the colonel designate of Charles Town, a Maroon town in Portland in the northeast part of the island. I could not miss out on this wonderful opportunity to visit a real Maroon town and talk first-hand with the man in charge.

Upon arrival in Charles Town, we immersed ourselves in the river for a few hours, then linked up with Colonel Frank Lumsden, or Uncle Lumsden as we called him. He took us from Quao's Village to Charles Town proper, where the Maroon cemetery, museum, and Asafu Yard can be found. The town has two cemeteries: one for Maroons and one for non-Maroons. It is understood by many Maroons that being a Maroon is distinctly different from being Jamaican.

A gun found in Charles Town used by Maroons in the 18th century, on display in the museum

"The Maroons, by their daily struggle for freedom, forged for themselves an identity according to which they judge themselves. If that struggle and identity are not understood then any judgement of them is not valid. This entire complex is dedicated to this understanding."

—Inscription in museum

Maroon Ethnicity

Frank explained to me that by the time the peace treaty was signed in 1739, a new Maroon ethnicity had been created, and this ethnicity is passed in blood, which determines which cemetery one can be buried.[1] This idea of a separate ethnicity is supported by Kopytoff, who first sets the stage saying, "ethnic identity should be seen here as a linking principle rather than a fixed attribute."[2] This linking initially occurred through "the flexible sense of a common heritage, the redefinition of ethnic identity, [and] the creation of a common culture out of disparate materials…[allowing] Jamaican Maroons to overcome the cultural differences that various local communities had developed, and to integrate their societies around a more generalized Maroon ethnicity."[3] She continues to say that the treaty played an important role in securing a special ethnicity by closing off "membership of the Maroon societies, thus insuring that in time they would become entirely Creole…making them unique, further [enhancing] their developing ethnicity."[4]

Proud Maroon children

Maroons are also considered unique from other Jamaicans because they do not pay taxes on their land, as no one is even allowed to own land given to the Maroons in the signing of the peace treaties. Unfortunately, because they do not pay taxes, the government does not feel obliged to help out much, leading to bad roads and less accessibility to the larger Jamaica. So although Maroons see themselves as having a distinct identity, they "do not see themselves as being a nation state all to themselves; they will not live to the exclusion of the Jamaican society. They regard themselves as having a right to proper roads, educational facilities and medical care. Their use of the institutions of the wider society and their exercising of the vote in national elections may seem to indicate a sense of identity with Jamaica on their part" as well.[5]

Mr. Kenneth Douglas in the Maroon museum with some community children

Travelogue: Journey to a Maroon Town in the Mountains

January 15, 2005—the day I was scheduled to visit the Charles Town Maroons in the parish of Portland, Jamaica, high up in the Blue Mountains. I woke up with excitement and readiness for what was to come. My opportunity to conduct real ethnographic research with the Maroons, the people I have spent countless hours reading about and becoming fascinated with, was just a drive away. This was easier said than done, as I was soon to find out. An hour driving up curvy roads, through mud and around quite regular obstacles in the road, gazing down into the valleys of sheer beauty, led us to a non-negotiable dead end. A closed road. A tree and warning tape cutting off access to my research. As is often the case, the journey was half the fun, and actually for today had to count for all the fun. As we drove, I gained so many insights into the struggle of the Maroons looking around at the vastness and grandeur of the terrain. The British had no chance of conquering them.

January 16, 2005—If you can't get over 'em, you better go around them. Today was the second attempt to make it to Charles Town. This time, however, we made it. We entered the town with such ease that I thought for sure we were not in the right place. Going around the mountains made the town much more accessible. It was very close to the sea and just up from the town was a place called Quao's Village with a nice river running through, which must have provided much water to the Maroons of the area. The trip to Charles Town was fabulous, eating a lunch of fresh fish with two very influential men in the community, being shown around the cemetery where many important Maroons were buried, exploring the museum and Asafu Yard used for dancing and performances, and meeting the wonderful children and adults of the community. Maroon pride was everywhere and could be felt. It was an experience I will cherish forever.

CHARLES TOWN CONTINUED

Reviving the Maroon Spirit

Their unique ethnicity is held onto with strength for many Maroons today, however this was not always the case. Through the years, there has been a "relative deterioration of Maroon traditions and cultural activity," coupled with the loss of oral traditions.[6] It is recently that a huge effort has been made to

Colonel Frank Lumsden (Charles Town) gives Colonel Peddie (Accompong) a gift

restore cultural traditions and revive the Maroon spirit. Frank's brother Keith, who is an architect and the chairman of the Charles Town Maroon Council, was very instrumental in beginning such an initiative in Charles Town. He did a great deal of work designing a plan for further development of the area for the benefit of the Maroons as well as for tourist ventures. This included the construction of a Maroon museum and an Asafu Yard, or dancing ground, for performances of many kinds. Frank and Kenneth Douglas then focused their energies on the further development of the museum, filling it with many authentic Maroon artifacts and things of interest. Being a well-known Jamaican artist, Frank also started painting some beautiful murals on the outside of the museum and carving images into the walls of the Asafu Yard. The museum seemed to me to be a fairly central part of the community, especially for the children who could go there and get books to read or have the possibility of access to a computer. It was also close to the football field, where kids could gather and play.

The children are seen as an important part of the community and are allowed to actively participate in community gatherings and ceremonies, including the blowing of the abeng, a very sacred duty. Traditional dance and drumming are passed down through the generations. A bigger effort is now being made to continue passing down the language used by the ancestors, based off Twi, which comes from Ghana. Twi is currently used only for rituals and ceremonies, as well as carrying out business.[7]

Tourist Ventures

I was very impressed by the efforts being made for the dual purpose of reviving the Maroon spirit and providing employment through tourism. Uncle Frank showed me a map of the future plans of the area, which included hiking trails along some historical paths, making use of some of the areas beautiful views. These trails will allow for the use of tour guides, helping with the unemployment that plagues the community.[8]

All four Maroon towns are actively getting on board the tourist bus, with Accompong in the west plunging forward with the creation of the Accompong Town Maroon Foundation, launched January 6, 2005. Colonel Sidney Peddie said, "My dream is that Accompong will become the most sought-after tourist attraction in the Caribbean."[9] There are many benefits to this, including employment opportunities and the chance to inform more people

Rum is sprayed onto the drums before beginning, feeding the spirits of the ancestors

about the Maroons. Nothing comes without a cost, however. Joy Lumsden, the sister-in-law of Frank writes, "If the Maroons of Charles Town and other Maroon communities decide to go ahead into business-like exploitation of their heritage for their economic benefit, they will, I think, have to give up something of their perception of themselves as a distinct and special section of the Jamaican population. The paradox is that in making use of their past, they will have to objectivize [sic] it, therefore putting themselves in the same position as any other student or observer of Maroon history."[10] It is true that one walks a thin line when trying to create a tourist attraction as well as preserve a way of life, but for the Maroons, this is becoming a necessary path to take, and one they are taking with excitement and dedication. I think the end results will be rewarding.

Paintings of Maroons along the side of the museum

Annual Celebration

June 23rd is an important day for the Charles Town Maroons. It is called Quao Day, named after the original leader of Charles Town who was a great hunter and military strategist, and it celebrates the signing of the peace treaty with the British on that day in 1739. With the efforts and visions of Frank and Keith Lumsden, the past few celebrations have brought important changes for the Charles Town Maroons in reviving the Maroon spirit. In 2003, 30 Ghanaians from the Kwahu region made their way to

Two Charles Town Maroon children dance to some traditional drumming

Charles Town. It is believed that Quao (Kwahu) and possibly Nanny came from the Kwahu region, making this a "reunion of kindred spirits."[11] That same year hailed in the first-ever Nanny/Quao Abeng Award, "presented to a Maroon descendant who has performed exemplary in their field of endeavour, and in so doing make a contribution to the development of Jamaica; culturally, socially, economically or academically," intended to be one of the highlights of each subsequent Quao Day celebration.[12] Last year, 2004, brought the official opening of the museum and Asafu Yard, both of which are incredible additions to the Maroon community. Who's to say what will come next.

Continuing Progress

Progress is evident in the parts of Charles Town I saw. Developments are happening, and rapidly it seems to revitalize the culture and heritage. I cannot wait to go back the next chance I get to see the continuing chances, and maybe even become a part of that change. The energy in Charles Town is so refreshing and inspirational. As an anthropologist, tourist, and interested party, I would recommend anyone who is around the area of Portland to stop in for a visit. But keep in mind, if you go on a Sunday, you will not get to hear any drumming.

The Charles Town Maroon drummers are highly skilled, pounding out complicated rhythms

Rebellion Breaks Out in Jamaica: Reasons for The First Maroon War (1655-1739)

The First Maroon War is generally thought of as occurring between 1720 and 1739, with a peace treaty bringing it to an end. However, from the very beginning of British colonial power on the island in 1655, rebellion was a routine event. There were 85 years of revolts and raiding, runaways and ruckus. And really, why wouldn't there be? Patterson, a leading sociologist from Jamaica, put together a hypothesis explaining why the First Maroon War occurred. He lays out seven preconditions increasing the incidence of slave revolts. Following each is what the conditions in Jamaica during the time period of 1655-1739.

1) "Where the slave population greatly outnumbers that of the master class."

In Jamaica, the ratio got as high as 10:1, favoring the slaves. A small attempt by the government to curb this was bringing in indentured laborers.

2) "Where the ratio of local to foreign-born slaves is low."

The more slaves who are not born into a system of slavery where it is all they know, the more likely they are to want to get out of the system. In Jamaica, about 4 out of 5 slaves were born in Africa and had no interest in being a slave.

3) "Where the imported slaves, or a significant section of them, are of common ethnic origin."

The English tended to favor Coromantees from the Gold Coast of Africa, of Akan-speaking origins, contributing to over half of the slave population in Jamaica. They were stereotyped to be hard workers, and probably were, as expansion and conquest were taking place on the home front during this period of time, employing their strong military traditions.

4) "Where geographical conditions favor guerrilla warfare."

There is no doubt Jamaica was prime territory for this condition to be covered, with the cockpits in the west and the Blue Mountains in the east.

5) "Where there is a high incidence of absentee ownership."

Jamaica's plantation owners often lived elsewhere, putting the estate in the hands of overseers with little interest in making unnecessary risks protecting it or the slaves.

6) "Where the economy is dominated by large-scale, monopolistic enterprise."

Early Major Revolts and Maroon Settlements

In this scenario, each slaves becomes less important, leading to more brutality and apathy about loss of slaves. The rules of supply and demand play out nicely—supply of slaves is high, so importance becomes low.

7) "Where there is weak cultural cohesiveness, reinforced by a high [male: female] sex ratio among the ruling population."

Seemingly a continual theme, there were also few women among the master class. This created an unbalanced society, somewhat void of cultural institutions, namely the family. This hurt both the ruling class by not having any unity or cultural cohesion of which to stand on as a means of power, and the slaves by not having any cultural form or structure to situate themselves in, adding to their total sense of meaninglessness.[1]

And so it went, with slave revolt after slave revolt. It was around 1720 that things really began to heat up. Cudjoe was rising in power among the Leeward Maroons, creating a united front and building cultural cohesion among his group. Quao and Nanny were holding together parts of the Windward Maroons, though they never joined together under one leader like their counterparts.[2] From 1720, both sides fought hard, which included raiding plantations, going on quests searching out the enemy, importing dogs and Native Americans from other countries, and torturing and killing opposing forces at first chance. Between the years of 1732 and 1739 when the peace treaties were signed, many efforts were made by the British to overpower the Maroons, but their incredible guerilla tactics sustained their existence. More specific details of events in the First Maroon War can be found in the obituaries of the leaders involved in them.

Revisiting Patterson's hypothesis, we see clear preconditions very well met in Jamaica to build and sustain the First Maroon War. Perhaps if peace had not been made, the British would have found a way to get the upper hand, and maybe not. Lieutenant Philip Thicknesse, of the British army, once said, "All the regular troops in Europe could not have conquered the Wild Negroes by force of arms; and if Mr. Trelawny (the governor) had not wisely given them what they contended for Liberty, the would, in all probability have been, at this day, masters of the whole country."[3]

Perhaps.

Disaster Strikes Again: The Second Maroon War

July 1795 marks the month that triggered it all. Two Trelawny Town Maroons killed two hogs, and as punishment were flogged in the middle of town, supposedly by two slaves that had previously been returned under the action of the Maroons. This horribly humiliated the Maroon community and an uprising ensued.[1]

Governor Lord Balcarres led the colonial forces, rather unsuccessfully for a couple months, incurring huge losses as he pretentiously ran a campaign of circling around the Maroons. Maroons, being Maroons, easily slipped through the troops at leisure. Under Balcarres, many of the great British commanders fell, including Colonel William Fitch, who was highly revered.[2] Many men were also lost under Balcarres and very few, if any, Maroons perished under the European military strategies employed. Colonel George Walpole took Fitch's position and due to a discouraged Balcarres was given a great deal of command over the offensive campaign, which became one of cutting off water supplies and running a starvation offensive.[3] Over the next four months, Walpole trained his men to fight in a similar way to the Maroons, decreasing the number of deaths incurred.

Nearly uninterrupted fighting continued for three months under Walpole, with many losses. Higher rewards were being given for the kill or capture of Maroons, making it obvious that the Brits were having a hard time taking them down.[4] Finally around mid-December, Walpole was being pressured to make peace. The Maroons were running very low on provisions and so, trusting Walpole, agreed to peace around December 19, under four terms, the last being a promise that they would not be deported from Jamaica.[5] Balcarres, however, had plans of his own. Once most of the Trelawny Maroons had submitted, he announced deportation to Halifax, Nova Scotia in May 1796. Violating the treaty, Walpole was very upset and resigned his position, angering the Assembly, who was granting him great honors.[6]

Although only a brief 5-month war, the Second Maroon War consisted of 20 actions involving nearly 5,000 troops, over 30% of them highly-trained professional soldiers, supported by Mosquito Indians and savage Cuban hunting dogs, going against less than 300 Trelawny Maroon Warriors.[7] With very few slaves coming to their aid, and the Accompong Maroons actually going against them, the Trelawny Maroons fought alone, under some great leaders by the names of Johnson, Smith, Charles Shaw, James Palmer and Leonard Parkinson, the last two of which Walpole said, "If [they] alone had decided not to cooperate with the authorities, the country could not defeat them,"[8]

Brief Jamaican History

1500s

600-1000 AD: Arawak Indians arrived in Jamaica from South America

1494: Columbus made his first visit to Jamaica

1503-1504: A shipwreck strands Columbus on the island's north coast during the explorer's fourth expedition. The explorer stays at Santa Gloria, now St. Ann's Bay.

1509: The first Spanish colony is established in Jamaica in what is now St. Ann's Bay.

1513: Enslaved Africans arrive in Jamaica.

1520: Jamaica begins to cultivate sugarcane.

1600s

1598: The Spanish governor proposes a separate area for the Arawak Indian population, which was quickly diminishing due to disease and hard labor conditions. The proposal fails.

1655: British troops invade and take over Jamaica. No Arawaks remain alive on the island.

1656: British colonists settle at Port Morant; most die from disease.

1670: Peace of Madrid officially puts Jamaica under British rule.

1678: First mention of slave uprising.

1690: First significant slave uprising in Clarendon; many slaves escape into Cockpit Country.

1690-1739: First Maroon War fought across the island as British fight Maroons.

1700s

1692: Port Royal suffers a catastrophic earthquake and thousands die.

1760: Slave uprising in St. Mary led by Tacky, a runaway slave.

1795: Second Maroon War.

1800s

1831: Hanging of Sam Sharpe, leader of last great slave rebellion, in Montego Bay.

1834: Slavery brought to an end. For four years after this event, slaves had to work without pay.

1835: Small groups of Germans arrive in Jamaica in Seaford Town.

1838: Slavery officially abolished in Jamaica.

1900s

1838-1917: Large migration of Indians into Jamaica.

1860-1893: Large migration of Chinese into Jamaica as indentured workers.

1960: Tourism industry begins.

1962: Jamaica becomes independent country.

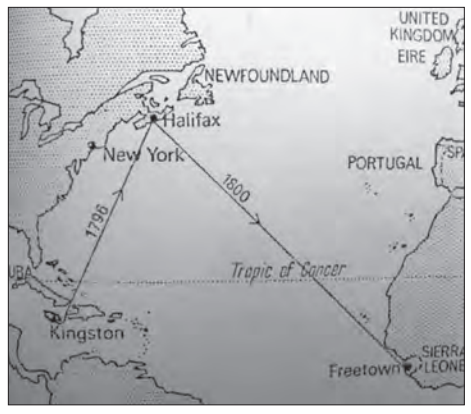
1980: Elections result in hundreds of deaths in violent protests across island.

1988: Hurricane Gilbert hits Jamaica.[1]

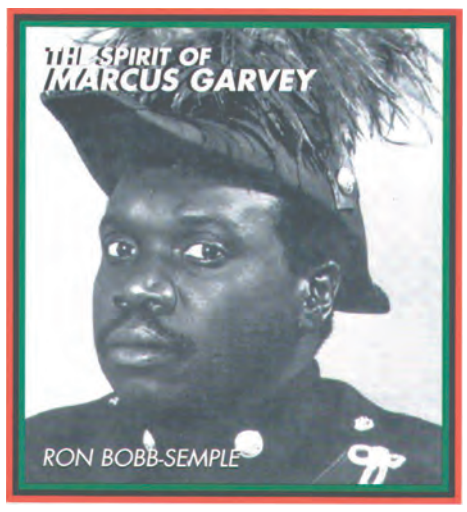
Garvey's Dream Fulfilled Before His Time: Or Was It?

Marcus Garvey is one of the most well known Jamaicans of all time. He was called Black Moses by the masses and is even considered a prophet by many Rastafari.[1] He preached Pan-African messages of self-reliance and self-rule, Black power, pride, and liberation. "Back to Africa," was his message, "Africa for the Africans."

Little did the Trelawny Town Maroons know that they would be fulfilling his dream even before he was a dream. Nearly 100 years before Garvey began his Black liberation movement, these Maroons had the unfortunate experience of being deceived after signing a peace agreement ending the Second Maroon War, resulting in deportation to Nova Scotia and eventually on to Sierra Leone. The process is exactly opposite of what Garvey stood for and had in mind, but the end result is still something to be proud of.



Map of the Trelawny Maroons' Deportation



Marcus Garvey (1887-1940)

Garvey had created a self-reliance plan, where "Garvey wanted black people in America to set up their own nation in Africa. They would rule it and develop it, and it would protect black people all over the world."[2] Minus the last specification, the Trelawny Town Maroons were successful setting up their own quasi-nation in Sierra Leone, creating an enclave, ruling it, developing it, and gaining huge respect in the community.

When the Trelawny Town Maroons were moved from Jamaica 1n 1796, their first stop was Nova Scotia, Canada. Cold climates for most of the year led to the inability to work the fields and the opportunity for the Governor to require Christian education in hopes of conversion. They generally resisted, irritating the religious leaders around.[3]

When it came time for planting, they again caused irritation to the Canadians and Jamaican government at home, refusing to become indentured servants as well as not becoming self-sufficient, which was costing both governments large sums of money. Indentured servitude would have "[tarnished] their heritage," and self-sufficiency was not possible with such cold weather climates and such a short growing season.[4] And so it was eventually decided to send them to Sierra Leone, a West African country no European power really controlled. It was originally composed of small independent kingdoms and traders were welcome to be under the protection of those independent kingdoms if they brought it wanted or needed goods.[5]

In 1880, 550 Maroons arrived in Sierra Leone, bringing their skills of guerilla warfare to assist the government against various rebellions. Everyone was very impressed by their great skills, which earned them their citizenship. They were described as being "active and intrepid, prodigal of their lives, confident of their strength, proud of the character of their body (community), and fond, though not jealous of their heritage."[6] This success, however, led to hatred by others around. Nonetheless, the Maroons stuck together, eventually resettling in Freetown. In 1810, they made up nearly half of Freetown's population (807 of 1,917 people). They created an enclave with an independently run governmental system, complete with jurymen and constables. Jobs ranged from a laborer to a lawyer, and the Maroons did them all, some rising to high positions in Sierra Leone.[7]

As Marcus Garvey would proclaim, "Up! You mighty race, you can accomplish what you will." And the Maroons did.

OBITUARIES

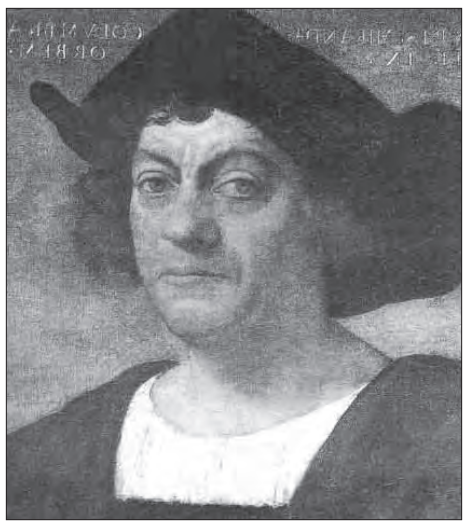
IMPORTANT SPANISH LEADERS & SPANISH MAROONS

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus, 54 of Genoa, Italy died May 20, 1506 in Valladolid, Spain of Reiter's Syndrome, a rare tropical disease.[1]

He was born in 1451, the son of a wool merchant and weaver. In 1492, he made his first journey across the Atlantic Ocean, expecting to land in India, but hit North America instead. Two years later he landed in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica, claiming the island for Spain. On his fourth and ultimate voyage West looking for a way to got from the West Indies to the Indian Ocean, he ran into troubles. Hurricanes, bad weather, and Indian attacks throughout the voyage caused a number of ships to go down, forcing him to land in Jamaica. From 1503-1504, he was stranded awaiting rescue from sickness, disease, desertion and a staged mutiny of his company.[2] Kept alive by trading with the Arawaks, Columbus, with the help of his Spanish compadres, chose to repay them with a slow death over 150 years through "ill-treatment, European diseases, and the introduction of cattle, which destabilized native agriculture."[3] By 1611, of the 60,000 estimated Arawaks, 74 were left on the island,[4] and by 1655 they were completely nonexistent.[5]

Before being completely annihilated, however, it is said that some Arawaks escaped into the Blue Mountains, becoming the first Maroons on the island. Legend also states that they fused together with Maroons of African descent, establishing a 'tradition of guerilla defense in the mountains,' which presumably



was the huge force in the Maroons' favor against the British. Although it is both possible and likely that the runaway Arawak and African slaves combined forces and even had children together, their influence on the future waves of Maroons is "minimal at best."[6]

Columbus and the Spanish did not have much to be proud of in Jamaica—killing off a whole ethnic group as well as never really developing the island, however his influence remains an important part of Jamaican history, especially in the indirect effects the settlers had on their slaves, allowing them to build many survival skills that would help them greatly when the British arrived in 1655.

Survivors in Jamaica include his son, Diego, appointed Governor of the Indies in 1508, approximately 700 Spanish settlers, and approximately 600 slaves of African origin (1611).[7]

He is preceded in death by 60,000–10,000 Arawaks (1655).

Governor Juan de Serras

Juan de Serras, age unknown, of Jamaica died on an unknown date in Jamaica, a free man by his standards.

Little is written about de Serras, but it is my assumption that he was a creole, who materialized into the great leader of the original Maroons.

These Spanish Maroons were unlike the better-known Maroons of the English era. De Serras' Maroons were creoles, born into a system of slavery. They originated not from the Akan region of West Africa, but from the northern parts of West Africa and Angola, in the south, creating a fairly diverse ethnic mix. They knew how to work together, setting the stage of resistance.[1]

Under the Spanish, there were few cases of runaways, as the masters held little rein over their slaves. Being a runaway was new to de Serras' group, called Vermahaly Negroes. Jamaica was mainly used for ranching, and tracking cattle and hogs, allowing free-rein that skilled many of the slaves in knowledge of the terrain. Other privileges were also offered to "free blacks and mulattoes who were not only allowed to carry weapons but who were trained to serve in the Spaniards' militia."[2]

Ten years after Ysassi had left, de Serras and his group were still wanted by the English, declared outlaws with bounties on their heads. Getting away from the British, they made their way up north, eventually causing the British to leave them alone. For the next 30 years, little was known about them. There were a few accounts of runaways in contact with them, but treated so badly they went back to their masters or found other runaways. However, around 1700, in dire need of basic necessities, as well as women and weapons, they joined ranks with the other established groups of Maroons.[3]

Survivors include his remaining followers, the Vermahaly Negroes, who became the first Maroons with full autonomy.

He is preceded in dead by all those Maroons willing to die for the cause of righteous freedom.

Governor Cristóbal de Ysassi

Cristóbal de Ysassi, age unknown, died in Cuba sometime after 1660.

Ysassi was born in Jamaica, "a planter of Jamaican birth and basque origins, brother to the Bishop of Puerto Rico and the Lt. Governor of Cuba. He was Jamaica's last Spanish Governor,"[1] appointed in 1656 by the King of Spain for his dedicated service in defending Jamaica from Britain.[2]

When 8,000 Brits landed in Jamaica in 1655, the Spanish were essentially forced to fight or leave. Some quickly rowed over to Cuba, bringing along their slaves and other possession. Others took to the hills, freeing their previous slaves, who became the first Maroons. Together these Maroons and their former masters banded together to fight against the English. The Maroons formed three groups. Juan de Bolas led one group, Juan de Serras another, and the third remains ambiguous. Ysassi took to the hills, allying himself with these three groups. He promised freedom and clothes to those who fought with him against the British.[3] After some successful revolts against the English, he arrogantly wrote to Spain saying, "all the fugitive Negroes are under my obedience." However true it may have been that he was aligned with a good portion of the Maroons, he was not in control.[4] For it was the Spanish who needed their ex-slaves much more than the other way around.

As Parris points out, "When opportunities presented themselves to side with one European nation against another, the fugitive black groups were not slow to weigh the costs and benefits of alliance-making." In this case, many of the ex-slaves sided with him because it was in their best interest. Many of the skirmishes were lost only when there was a low representation of blacks.[5] Such was the case in one of Ysassi's biggest defeats at Rio Nuevo in 1758, when nearly 100 men were pounded by English troops landing in Jamaica. Many of the survivors and others who were not in the battle were sent to Cuba. Ysassi remained with about 50 men, waging more battles against the English until the beginning of 1760 when de Bolas traded sides, going with the English taking his followers with him. Ysassi knew this was the end and made two canoes, loaded in 76 of his men, and headed off to Cuba.[6]

Survivors in Jamaica include Juan de Serras, his ally, 36 of his men, and British control.

He is preceded in death by the freed Spanish slaves who helped fight the British with him, as well as the Brits he managed to kill.

Governor/Colonel Juan de Bolas

Juan de Bolas, born Juan Lubolo, age unknown, of Jamaica died in 1663 in ambush, possibly set up by Juan de Serras.

De Bolas was a creole, born in Jamaica. When the British invaded in 1655, he emerged as a great leader among the Africans, being elected a leader of the group of ex-slaves who formed in the mountain near the Guanaboa Vale.[1] He was a great hunter and knew a great deal about the island's interior, and proved to be an essential resource and ally to Ysassi. However, after about five years of fighting with the British, de Bolas joined the enemy forces.[2] The English were offering freedom and a big title—Governor of the Vale. Freedom was something Ysassi has also promised, but could not give until a later time. In exchange for this freedom, de Bolas and his followers were expected to be loyal to the English, teach their children English, and "[search] for, and [destroy], the blacks who continued to reject the British overtures."[3] With his extensive knowledge of the other fugitives' strategies, hideouts, and other critical information, this would not be too hard.

Called a traitor, de Bolas was doing what he thought was in the best interests of himself and his group for survival. De Bolas pulled through his end of the deal, tracking Spaniards to their camps, and even attacking de Serras' camp before he knew de Bolas had switched over. De Serras was continually offered peace but refused. The enraged British ordered de Bolas "to wipe out the Maroon menace once and for all." On the way, however, he was caught in ambush and killed, along with most of his force. It is thought that de Serras set up the ambush.[5]

Survivors include the rest of his community, "who either died out or migrated farther to the west,"[6] de Serras, who remained steadfast to freedom in its true essence, and the British, who, shortly after making their peace agreement, took away his title as Governor and renamed him Colonel of the Black Militia, demonstrating their true power over Jamaica.[7]

He is preceded in death by Christopher Columbus.

Important British Leaders

Governor Robert Hunter

Governor Robert Hunter, 67 of Ayrshire, Scotland, died in 1734 in Jamaica.

Hunter was born in Scotland, distinguishing himself as a soldier in both Scotland and America. In 1707 he was declared Lt. Governor of Virginia, and from 1710-19 served as Governor of New York and New Jersey. In 1727 he was appointed Governor of Jamaica to go and take care of the Maroons. The strategy he entertained was to minimize their strength and reduce their numbers so they would be forced to abide by any terms offered by the British. To do this he focused on bringing in more settlers, having them settle in areas critical to Maroon survival, cutting off communication and access to provisions. Although he built barracks, the Maroons continually destroyed the newly settled areas. Running out of necessary funds, Hunter wrote to England asking for more troops.[1]

Hunter sent many war parties to fight the Maroons, but they were ambushed and driven back time and time again. In 1731, a party of about 180 men did manage to surprise a Maroon village near Port Antonio, incurring very few losses, however, the Maroons retired to the mountains, leaving the party with no Maroons as prisoners or even wounded.[2] By 1732, chaos was afoot. Both sides were killing just about anyone they could find on the enemy. Hunter wrote back to England saying, "The danger we are in proceeds from our slaves in rebellion. We have for several years (been put to) an extra-ordinary and almost insupportable expense in endeavoring to suppress them… But our attempts… having been in vain, only convinced me of our weakness. Instead of being able to reduce them, we are not in a condition to defend ourselves."[3]

The next two years brought more defeats, and in 1734 Hunter died never having achieved any real victory in Jamaica. Ironically however, just two months after his death, Nanny Town was seized, which was a stronghold of the Windward Maroons,[4] a victory he would have loved.

Survivors in Jamaica include the Maroon communities, in sufficient numbers, and those of his parties left to continue fighting for his goal of taking down the Maroons.

He is preceded in death by the members of his parties who fell to the skillful war techniques of the Maroons.

Ebenezer Lamb

Ebenezer Lamb, age unknown, fighting for the British died sometime after 1734 presumably in Jamaica, after earning his freedom.

Once a merchant from Europe, Lamb started life in Jamaica as an indentured servant, lowering his status to the bottom rung of white society. He was a schoolmaster to his owner's children until 1732 when he was put in charge of a military party going against the Leeward Maroons. Called one of the "most courageous and active of the commanders…in the records of the time," Lamb was successful in capturing Wiles' Town, and was rewarded with his freedom.[1]

He then went on to be a commander in two more attempts to attack the Windward Maroons in 1733. Both were unsuccessful, leaving Governor Hunter in shambles, yet Lamb's actions in each were highly praised.[2]

Lamb was among many indentured servants on the island. Many of the European settlers in Jamaica went over as indentured servants.[3] These servants either willingly sold themselves into the job or were kidnapped into it, usually working between 5 and 7 years for their freedom.

With the British taking control of Jamaica in 1655 and immediately employing a system of slavery, other Europeans were needed to balance the ratio of "master"-slave, which can minimize the incidence of revolts.[4] There were even Deficiency Laws of 1703, which "required any one who owned 300 African slaves and 120 head of stock, to keep a quota of 17 indentured servants."[5] To encourage masters to keep up the quota, port charges for ships carrying over 30 indentured servants were exempt.[6] When Hunter became governor in 1727, he made a huge push for more settlers, increasing the number of indentured servants.[7] It was in this wave that Lamb came along.

Survivors include the Maroon communities he unsuccessfully captured.

He is preceded in death by the many indentured servants that came before him.

Colonel John Guthrie

Colonel John Guthrie, 52 of the British forces died in 1739 while on an expedition of peace to the Windward Maroons.[1]

Guthrie is a very important part of both British history and Maroon history in Jamaica, ended the First Maroon War in 1739 by offering a peace treaty to Cudjoe, leader of the Maroons, who accepted. Two years prior to the signing, the acting Governor, John Gregory, suggested it was time to make a treaty with the Maroons, for as he wrote to the British Counsel and Assembly, "[I know] of two ways of dealing with an enemy: 'either by force, or by treaty; the first we have often unsuccessfully tried.'"[2] His plan was rejected initially, but went full force after Maroon raids picked up again. Guthrie, along with Captain Saddle, was sent by the new Governor Trelawny to offer peace to Cudjoe and his group.[3]

Aided by a number of Maroon traitors, Cuffee, Sambo, and Quashie, among others, Guthrie was able to discover Cudjoe's town.[4] Accounts of the journey to the town, how the peace treaty was presented and its acceptance vary and are highly debated. But nonetheless, a 15-point treaty was signed. Zips summarizes them nicely as follows:

"The free 'separatists' were granted the right to plant 1,500 acres of coffee, cocoa, ginger, tobacco, and cotton on lands belonging to them; to breed cattle, hogs, goats, and any other livestock; to sell their products in the marketplace; to hunt wherever they wished; to call the authorities in the even of white raids; and to inflict any punishment (other than capital punishment) they deemed proper for crimes committed by Maroons within their own communities.

"Their primary duties were the following: to serve in the military in order to protect the colony against slave uprisings or other rebellions and to avert attacks by foreign powers; to capture all future runaways for a premium and return them to the colonial authorities; to hand over criminals from their own ranks to colonial courts; to allow access to the major roads of their villages; and to grant two white 'diplomats' right of residence and allow the governor or colonial commander certain rights of nomination in appointing future Maroon commanders."[5]

After making peace with the Leeward Maroons, Guthrie set out to make a similar treaty with the Windward Maroons, although a few other groups were heading toward the same goal. He was sent with 50 of Cudjoe's men, but fell ill and died on the way, conceivably poisoned by the "discontented slaves" unhappy about the peace agreement.[6] Lt. Philip Thicknesse and Lt. Adair ultimately fulfilled the peace agreement on June 23, 1739, nearly four months after the Leeward treaty.

Survivors include the Maroons, now living in "peace."

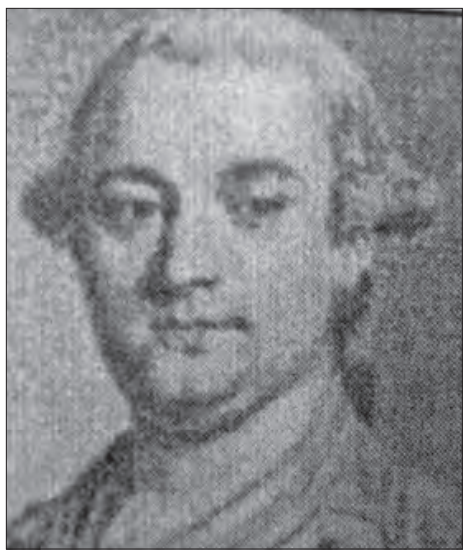
He is preceded in death by the previous existence of the Maroons, already having everything the treaties granted them, except peace and being under the jurisdiction of their former enemies.[7]

Lieutenant Philip Thicknesse

Lieutenant Philip Thicknesse, 72 of Staffordshire, England, died in 1792 near Boulogne, France.

When Thicknesse was just 17, he joined the army and was sent to Jamaica to help fight against the Maroons, just shortly before the peace treaties were made in 1739. Upon arrival, he was put second-in-command under Lt. Concannen in search of a Windward Maroon town, which happened to be under the great Quao. A skillfully planned ambush wounded many of the force and scared off the rest, leaving only the officers. Fearing for their lives, the officers also eventually retreated.[1]

Given a second chance three months later to prove himself, Thicknesse was assigned to go with Captain Adair to the Windward Maroons to make peace, one of a few groups sent for the same reason. Once they got to the town, Thicknesse was sent up to the town to be held while a Maroon captain went down to discuss with Adair. He was greeted with a general hatred, especially by "an old hagg," presumed to be Nanny, who was encouraging the villagers to cut of his head.[2] Lucky for him, he came out alive after Quao signed a peace treaty similar to the one Cudjoe had signed, which ended his stay in Jamaica.[3]



Thicknesse then went back to England, becoming Governor of Landguard Fort from 1753-1766, and was quite disliked, "being argumentative and a tyrant."[4] After 16 years in office he resigned, with great relief of the people, dying 26 years later in France.

Survivors include his son, Lord Audley, who was given the right hand of his father along with a bitter message of being abandoned by Audley.[5]

He is preceded in death by all the men lost in the horrible ambush led by Quao.

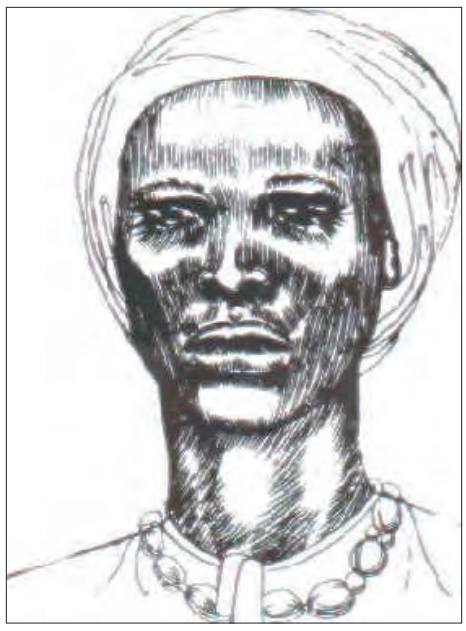
Important Maroon Leaders

Granny Nanny

Nanny of Jamaica died sometime after 1740, probably in Moore Town.

Nanny is the most widely known Maroon in Jamaican history, yet details of her life are unverifiable and remain quite a mystery. Folklore, myth, and legend tell the amazing heroic tales of her existence. She is a symbol of "hope in times of crisis and [fosters] respect for her own Ashanti traditions. She is also immortalized as a high priestess with great powers."[1] These great powers refer to obeah, oftentimes called black magic or witchcraft. Serving an important purpose at the time of English colonization, the "individual revenge and resistance against the oppressors were crucial to psychic survival."[2] For many people, Nanny, hand-in-hand with Obeah, offers that confidence and power against the oppressors. Obeah is still used on the island today.

Born either on the Gold Coast or as a creole in Jamaica, Nanny's story is heavy, epitomizing her as "the true spirit and role of the Caribbean woman in the fight for freedom and human dignity."[3] It was reported that she, who after being approached by Quao, discouraged the idea of making peace or any other accommodations with the British. While Cudjoe in the west and Quao in the east deceived the original purpose of the Maroons, Nanny remained steadfast. When the British eventually arrived, Lt. Thicknesse, said upon seeing her that she terrified him, wearing a girdle around her waist



dangling in knives, which no doubt had been "plunged in human flesh and blood."[4]

The idea of Nanny as a strong woman also pulls her into the role of "mother" of the Maroons, in true matrilineal style characteristic of the Akan people. "All Maroons, whether or not actual genealogical ties can be show to exist between them, are held to belong to a single family." Windward Maroons claim more direct descent, whereas Leeward Maroons unite through the widely held belief that Nanny and Cudjoe are siblings.[5]

Survivors include all her "yoyo," or children, and all Jamaicans who continue to honor her.

She is preceded in death by all other Maroon women who her image represents, fighting alongside the Maroon men and securing the longevity of Maroon communities.

Accompong

Accompong, died sometime after 1740 presumably in the town named after him.

Relatively little is known of Captain Accompong, brother of the great leader, Cudjoe. In 1690, there was a huge uprising on Sutton's Estate, involving 400 slaves predominantly from the Gold Coast, causing many casualties against whites in the area. Some of the ringleaders were killed as well as others, but among those who escaped were Accompong and his brothers, Cudjoe and Johnny. From this time on, Cudjoe rose up as a great leader, elected to a head position in 1729, whence he appointed his brothers second in command.[1] Once in absolute power, Cudjoe "utilized a common African pattern to ensure unity by dividing the Maroons into military companies under the loyal command of [his captains]."[2] Accompong was put in charge of a smaller group of Maroons to facilitate plantation raiding and sent to the area now known as Accompong.[3]

Accompong and his brothers are thought to be creoles of Akan-speaking origins, coming from the Gold Coast. Although a critical precondition to ruling is not getting slaves from one region, the British threw this out the window in favor of the commonly held belief that Coromantees and slaves from the Gold Coast are heartier and better workers.[4] If so, some of this heartiness worked against them, with the Leeward Maroons being composed almost entirely of Coromantees.[5] It was these Maroons "who were not reducible by any regular plan of attack; who possessed no plunder to allure or reward the assailants; nor had any thing to lose, except life, and a wild and savage freedom."[6]

The plan of attack that eventually was pursued was a peace treaty in 1739, accepted by Cudjoe. Accompong did not attend the signing, as he was off with a military party. Although it is reported he was also participating in the deal,[7] he is not labeled as a traitor, like Cudjoe. His loyalties to his brother and senior officer took precedence.

Survivors include his town's residents, the only Maroon town left in the west part of the island, home of the Leeward Maroons.

He is preceded in death by those who died for the cause.

Quao

Quao of Jamaica died sometime after 1740, perhaps in Charles Town, where he was a leader.

Quao, assumed to be a Coromantee creole, was a fearless leader of the Windward Maroons on the east part of the island. Sometime before 1734 and the destruction of Nanny Town, Quao became a Maroon, quickly rising to the rank of Captain. He had good knowledge of the terrain and was an excellent military leader in guerilla warfare. Around 1739 shortly before peace was made with Cudjoe, a force was assembled to find a Windward Maroon town, led by Lt. Concannon and Lt. Philip Thicknesse. However, Quao had several lookouts and the force was spotted early on. Quao then sent several scouts to follow the men, who thought they were following the Maroons. In perfect form, a surprise ambush was prepared and executed, destroying the confidence of the British. Lucky for them, three months later a peace treaty was signed by Quao. Thicknesses later said, "All the regular troops in Europe could not have conquered the Wild Negroes by force of arms; and if Mr. Trelawny (the governor) had not wisely given them what they contended for Liberty, the would, in all probability have been, at this day, masters of the whole country."[1]

The ambush against Concannon and his men was the last big fight of what is known as the First Maroon War, and Quao the last renowned leader of the Windward Maroons. Following the treaty, the Windward Maroons split up, some following Nanny to Moore Town[2] and the others going with Quao to Crawford Town.[3] There was never a strong leader like Cudjoe of the Windward Maroons, and so disunity was common. Both prior to and after the treaty was signed, internal factional disputes plagued their settlements, resulting in the creation of Scotts Hall and Charles Town, two settlements that still remain today.[4]

Survivors include the continued existence and flourishing of a town where he was Captain.

He is preceded in death by all those caught in his genius ambushes.

Cudjoe

Cudjoe of Jamaica, probably over 80, died sometime after 1764,[1] perhaps in Trelawny Town, where he was a leader.

Along with his brothers, Accompong and Johnny, Cudjoe was involved in Sutton's rebellion of 1690, successfully escaping and rising to power in 1729. He was a military genius, very organized and intentional in creating a successful force against the British. In order to create a system for success, he realized unity under one leader was essential. As that leader, he could be "ruthless, even brutal,"[2] as well as unwelcoming to other Maroons. Around 1720, a group of Madagascars, originating from a group of shipwrecked slaves in 1669 who had retreated to its interior, led a rebellion and encouraged slaves to join them. Upon contact with the Leeward Maroons, Cudjoe killed the Madagascan leader and incorporated the others into his group.[3] He felt only one person could be in power to maintain the safety of the group. Even with the Windward Maroons, he was less than welcoming when, in 1735, a large group of them made a 150-mile trek across the island to join Cudjoe's group. They were accommodated for a few months then sent back to the mountains.[4]

It becomes more understandable why Cudjoe went this route when looking at the many pressures facing the sustainability of the Maroons. After years of heavy skirmishes with the British, who were now importing Mosquito Indians and dogs to aid their efforts the Maroons were faced with a shortage of provisions and, it is reported, they were not naturally reproducing so were continually losing their force. There were very few women and the only way to keep up their numbers was to integrate new members, which

Cudjoe was not too fond of, presenting its own problems.[5]

Cudjoe was also getting older and so in 1739 when Governor Trelawny made the order to issue peace, as real victory was far off, he accepted. "If peace had not been offered to [us], [we] had no choice left but either be starved, lay violent hands on one another, or surrender to the English at discretion," Cudjoe commented later.[6] He is often called a sell-out or trader, in a way going against what it means to be a true Maroon—someone "committed to…the spirit of freedom from any kind of slavery and the preservation of human dignity and self-respect."[7] By signing the peace treaty, the Maroons were given freedom and land, but were required to "take, kill, suppress, or destroy…all rebels…unless they submit to the same terms,[8] paradoxically becoming "an inspiration to the rebellious slaves at whom they shot on sight."[9]

Survivors include the Vermahaly Negroes, put in a similar situation who did not submit, and the many Maroons who still honor him as a great leader.

He is preceded in death by the many runaways he did, in fact "kill, suppress, or detroy," some being him own men who tried to initiate a rebellion.

EDITORIALS

JAMAICANS LACK OF MAROON KNOWLEDGE ASTONISHING

"Tell me everything you know about the Maroons"

"Nothing basically. It's really sad."

"Uh...."

"Maybe you should aks someone else."

When posing the above question to Jamaicans peers, I was greeted with such responses as, "Nothing basically. It's really sad," "I don't know anything except that I'm related to them," and "Maybe you should talk to my relatives who know about that stuff. We never learned much about them."

I was very surprised to hear that the general Jamaican population of my peers knew so little about the Maroons, with such a rich and interesting history. In the educational system in Jamaica, West Indian history is taught in 1st form, which is equivalent to 7th grade. This may be the last time people learn anything about the Maroons unless they opt to take West Indian and English history taught together in 5th and 6th form (11th and 12th grade) as electives. Even still, I have been told that the English history is emphasized more heavily. So for many, 1st form is the end.

The outlook was not always so glum, as there were a few people who blew me away by their insights into the Maroons. There were also a number of people who initially claimed to know nothing, but after further inquisition were able to recollect some fairly accurate information learned years ago. I have created two top 3 lists of things known about the Maroons and things misunderstood about the Maroons that I gathered in my questionings.

Top 3 things known about the Maroons

1. Nanny was one of their leaders.
As a Jamaican National Hero, Nanny is highly recognized in connection to the Maroons. However, general knowledge about her consists of her use of obeah and her ability to catch bullets in her butt and shoot them back out at the British. Nanny's actual existence is debated, as some believe she is a composite character given the positive attributes of a number of different women. When I mentioned this to a person I was questioning, she was shocked saying, "Oh, I'm crushed that Nanny [might not be] real. No one's told me anything differently 'til now." And this ambiguous nature of Nanny seems to contribute to the sparse and vague knowledge of the Maroons in general, creating them to be mystical, imaginary characters with an unbelievable history.

2. Cudjoe signed a peace treaty with the British.
Cudjoe is one of the second-most recognized Maroon names, famous for his iron fist leadership and his signing of the peace treaty with the British in 1738. He is looked upon with great respect by the general population

3. Accompong is a Maroon town.
This is the largest Jamaican Maroon town, located in the parish of St. Elizabeth on the leeward, or western, side of the island. It is most commonly known by the general population because of its size and history. It has been around the longest and carries the name of a great Maroon. There is a monument in the center of Accompong Town dedicated to Cudjoe. Also, the signing of the peace treaty occurred relatively close to Accompong Town.

Top 3 things misunderstood about the Maroons

1. Maroons are not primitive people who live in the bush.
The Maroons do live in areas considered country, but are not primitive. Both Accompong and Charles Town had full cell phone service, connecting its inhabitants to the rest of the world. And although the roads to Maroon towns are sometimes crazy, curvy, and in rough terrain, the towns are accessible and are actually aiming at becoming bigger tourist attractions in the coming years.

2. Maroons were not all slaves.
Because many Maroons were runaway slaves, it is not true that all Maroons were once slaves. There are a number of Maroons who ran away straight after passing through the middle passage, as well as a few groups of intended slaves who got shipwrecked and all went into the mountains or the cockpits.

3. Sam Sharpe, Tacky, and Paul Bogle were not Maroons.
These three men were often mentioned as being Maroons, but they were in fact leaders of slave rebellions that the Maroons assisted in putting down.

Many of the Maroon towns today are putting a great deal of energy into keeping their culture alive by passing on cultural elements and history to their children. It is my hope that their efforts are effective, not only in their communities, but in the rest of Jamaica as well. The next time someone comes by and asks a Jamaican what they know about Maroons, they will be able to respond saying, "Quite a bit. It's pretty good," "I know a lot because I'm related to them," and "I'm glad you're asking me. I've learned a great deal about them."

MAROON BLUES

Dear Cudjoe: I am on my way to Jamaica for the first time and I've been reading in my Jamaica travelers guide that there is something called a Maroon festival on January 6, which happens to be your birthday. I usually like festivals and I think I might want to go, but I don't have anything maroon to wear. My initial thought was since I'm a tourist I could get by wearing another color, but being that it says "Maroon" in the name of the festival, I don't want to risk it. What do you suggest?

Blue about Maroon Festival in Bethany, Minnesota

Cudjoe says: Maroon doesn't refer to the color. Maroons today are descendants of the freedom fighters during times of slavery on the island, from the early 1500s to the mid 1800s. There was little formation of Maroon communities in Jamaica until 1655, when the British took control of the island. Prior to the Brits, Spaniards ruled the island, claimed by Christopher Columbus. During those early years, there are a few accounts of the Arawak Indians, the original inhabitants of the island, forming "Maroon" communities in the mountains to escape the mass genocide of their people. However, the term "Maroon," as it is used to describe the "fugitive slaves from plantations in the New World," did not begin to be used in Jamaica until around 1670.[1] The word is thought to have originally come from the Spanish word *cimarrón*, generally meaning wild in reference to an animal. It is now primarily used to describe people like my ancestors, my descendants, and me—Afro-American/Caribbean runaway slaves/fugitives/"wild negroes."

Interestingly enough, Maroon communities sprouted up all over the Caribbean and even a few in the US. A number of the original Maroon communities are still in existence today, which includes four in Jamaica: Accompong, Charles Town, Moore Town, and Scotts Hall. Accompong is the only community left of the Leeward Maroons on the western side of the island. It is where the festival will be held.

DEAR CUDJOE

In 1992, there was a festival of another kind held at the Smithsonian Institute—Festival of American Folklife (FAF)—bringing together Maroons from all over the Americas to meet to "open a dialogue between the different Maroon communities; providing a forum in which Maroons from different countries can discuss ways of meeting the challenges affecting their societies."[2] It was a fabulous opportunity for Maroons to find out about other Maroon communities they did not even know existed.

So, there is no need to wear maroon to the festival. Go in some comfortable shorts and take in the beauty of the experience. And, yes, it is my birthday. I'll be something like 320 this year!

Tacky's Revolt: A Maroon Paradox

Easter celebrations around the world tend to be fairly quiet holidays where Christians gather with family and/or close friends to remember the honorable death of Jesus. Ironically, though, in Jamaican history, the Easter of 1760 holds a very different ambiance, marking the beginning of a five-month rebellion. The whole of Jamaica was stirred up and there were devastating effects. One of these effects, in my opinion, was the creation of concrete evidence tarnishing the Maroons' whole reason for existence—freedom from Babylon (the oppressor)—to the general populous.

Many accusations are made against the Maroons, charging them with being sell-outs and traitors. One such comment was made saying, "Di Maroon dem a weh traitor, dem lef di rest a di slave dem fi suffer, sign treaty wid di white man dem and tun round help dem hunt runaway slaves."[1] (The Maroons were traitors, leaving the rest of the slaves to suffer, signing a treaty with the white man, turning around and helping them hunt runaway slaves.) I have heard similar comments from a fair amount of people since beginning my interest in the Maroons, and it is easier for me to understand where these comments come from when looking at Tacky's Rebellion of 1760 and the paradox that exists in it.

Tacky's Revolt began on Easter Sunday of 1760, described as "one of the most well-planned, well-organized and widespread slave rebellions of the island."[2] Tacky was a Coromantee leader, who wanted to make the island into a free black society following Akan tradition. The uprising started in St. Mary, with Tacky and a small group of slaves killing their overseers. It then spread, leading to five months of fighting, over £10,000 in damages, and the loss of at least 1,000 blacks and 60 whites.[3] The Maroons were ordered to follow through on their end of the treaty, capturing and killing any runaway they could find, inclusive of a reward. They did this well, with a Maroon marksman taking Tacky down and ultimately ending the rebellion. However, credit is due to a certain party of Maroons, for after being ordered to pursue the rebels and bring back prisoners or evidence of killings, brought back a number of human ears. It was not discovered until much later that the ears had been cut off from rebels slain in previous battles.[4] Nonetheless, that party of Maroons and the Maroons who killed Tacky fell under the same label, polarizing opinions on the Maroons while giving people little leeway to take individuality into consideration.

The paradox in it all, then, is that the freedom fighting Maroons were the ones responsible for killing the leaders of rebellions and other slaves fighting for their freedom. The inspirations of the rebel leaders were the Maroons, however the poached had turned gamekeeper and the inspiration had turned deadly. It is undeniable that the Maroons were part of the prohibitory force against a successful rebellion, however I think there are too many factors in play to make such polarized arguments as "Maroons are traitors," or even "Maroons are traitors." To say either definitively is to disregard historical truths. So I am left with the conclusion that from their inception, the Maroon community has been made up of individuals, all of which are human. And although the name of the Maroons is somewhat "tarnished" by this and other instances of what might be considered "selling out," I am still amazed by their existence on a whole—united for freedom from the oppressive forces in their lives, they were fighting for their passion with skill and honor.

Election Debate: Voting in Maroon Country Only?

When the Maroons signed the 1739 peace treaty, they were granted self-control under the control of a Chief Commander, which later became known as a Colonel. As written in the treaty, the power was to be passed on after death from certain designated leaders, and after that the following leaders should be appointed by the current Chief Commander.[1]

After some time, the standard procedures became an election every five years of a Colonel. In Accompong, the elected leaders have generally been related, showing the "strong tendency towards a kinship-based network or that leadership rested with dominant family groups."[2] This is in line with the way the treaties were set up, as well as following both tradition English and African traditions of leadership.

The latest debate going on with the election process today revolves around where polling places should be located. In the past, polling places have been placed all around Jamaica so even Maroons who have left the Maroon towns for work or other reasons can continue to be a part of the process. Maroon elder and council member Melville Currie, however, wants to see this changed. "In the future, our elections will not be held in any other community across Jamaica…If we are having a Maroons election, then the Maroons who believe they are Maroons and who stand for the integrity of the Maroons, should visit Accompong, have their census taken there, and vote in Accompong," he declared.[3] The Colonel of Accompong, Sidney Peddie, is in favor of this idea, but it has not been put into action yet. He says, "This is the road we are thinking of going down but we have not yet made a decision."[4] It is unclear when this decision will be decided and put into action, but there are a little over four more years to decide before the next election for the Accompong Maroons comes around.

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Spotlight

Joy Lumsden

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Joy Lumsden

Joy Lumsden, former lecturer of History at the University of the West Indies, in her home surrounded by her many books

Born, raised and educated in Britain, Joy Lumsden made her way to Jamaica over 50 years ago after marrying a Jamaican man she met at Cambridge. The man she married was a Maroon, and she was a history lover, sparking her to delve into the history of the Maroons, specifically of Charles Town where her husband's family originates. As an outsider and a serious academic, she takes a much more objective look at Maroon history, creating her own theories about the controversial issues surrounding the Maroons. It was great to hear her points, spurring me to rethink and reevaluate the information I had previously heard or read. The following article reflects parts of our interview as well as drawing from an article she wrote found in Working, Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa, and the African Diaspora.

Maroons: Freedom Fighters?

The widely held romanticized view of Maroons as freedom fighters does not appeal to Dr. Lumsden. She sees the Maroons as working specifically for their own freedom. They were not fighting an ideological battle of Black oppression from White powers present in their lives. They were merely getting away from a horrible situation in hopes of gaining personal freedom. A form of institution or community then formed around a common goal for each persons' own self-interests, which was freedom and autonomy. Once in larger groups, they had more power and possibility for survival and success. In an article entitled, "Alliance and Competition: Four Case Studies of Maroon-European Relations," Parris writes, "When opportunities presented themselves to side with one European nation against another the fugitive black groups were not slow to weigh the costs and benefits of alliance-making."[1] This applied as well to any individual or group the Maroons came into contact with. That can help explain the different events in Maroon history.

When the Spanish were on the island, the plantation system was not very well developed, so the slaves just left when they could. Also when the English took over the island and brought in slaves, a number of them would escape the first chance they got. It is a natural tendency to be drawn to people from a similar background, so it is not surprising that the slaves from the Akan region of the Gold Coast banded together recreating what they knew politically, socially, and economically. Being from the coast of Africa, doing business with Europeans was not new to them. Making deals and signing treaties were business ventures that carried benefits of interest to them. And if and when they made the decision to do business with the Europeans, they followed through on their end of the bargain. After years of fighting with the British, the Maroons were offered the peace treaty, in which they saw many benefits, so they signed. However, the treaty required the Maroons to return any runaways, which is what causes many problems for people who look at the Maroons as freedom fighters fighting for Black liberation, making it seem like they are somehow selling out.

Maroons as Traitors?

Dr. Lumsden thinks that people need to try to understand the Maroons in context of the time period and in their own terms. The historical events cannot be explained from a present day context because there are so many different factors in play. "The Maroons' almost totally consistent fulfillment of their treaty obligations has made it difficult, if not impossible, for advocates of a freedom fighter hypothesis to explain and justify Maroon actions during the greater part of their history."[2]

Blame has become a big issue that needs to be eliminated, getting rid of the dichotomy of Maroons as either heroes or traitors. The Maroons always thought they were as good as the Whites and expected to be met on equal terms. They even felt superior to the rest of the Black population, because they were being proactive in fighting for their freedom. Over 100 years after signing the peace treaty, an act was passed in 1842 placing the Maroons "on the same legal footing as all other British subjects in Jamaica." They were not prepared "to accept that they had now become…like the rest of the White, Coloured and Black population, including the newly freed slaves. They still considered themselves to be a special people, with a distinct relationship with the British authorities."[3] This act was a big blow to their understanding of the treaty. Dr. Lumsden's article on the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, led by Paul Bogle, gives the impression that for the Maroons this was an opportunity to reestablish their special status with the British, remaining loyal and helping put down the rebellion. They also "had no commonality of interests with the people Bogle represented, and saw no advantage in allying with them."[4] However, as mentioned earlier, there were times where, if the cost benefit analysis proved favorable, alliances were made with slaves.

Slave and Maroon Cooperation?

Highlighting such a situation is the delightful story of Mimba and Sarah, told to me by Dr. Lumsden. "Mimba was a slave woman and Sarah was a runaway slave. Both of them were captured by the leader of a band of runaways and clearly he kept them as sex partners and to do housekeeping for him and whatnot. The two of them divided their time with him for about three months. And when they had their opportunity they got him, killed him, and cut off his ears, which was the regular way of indicating you'd killed somebody. They took his ears in and the two of them were rewarded with pensions for life. And you can see the pensions …year after year, it's there in the accounts of the Assemblies that these two women, one a slave, I think the slave girl was given her freedom, as that's usually what happens, [and a runaway worked together for their own benefits.] [This story] shows a number of things: women obviously weren't just lying down under what happened to them. They were quite able to take matters into their own hands and deal with people. And that Maroons and slaves could cooperate. There's another delightful thing that comes out in much the same period. The members of the Assembly are trying to consider what they can do about the fact that because Maroons can get money for returning runaway slaves, the Maroons make agreements with slaves to pick up the slaves off the edges of the estates, claim that they captured them, take them in, get the reward money, and then share the money with the slaves. And so the members of the Assembly are scratching their heads as to how do we stop that happening? That's such a typically Jamaican thing to happen. It just shows that things haven't changed all that much."

But in many ways, things have changed for the Maroons. Although they still live on the land granted to them by the British government and do not have to pay taxes, Jamaica is now an independent country that Britain no longer has control of, so there is no validity in holding any special status with the Brits. Maroons are slowly becoming integrated into the greater Jamaican society, but as of late there has been a big push in the Maroon communities to revive the Maroon spirit and reestablish a separate identity passed on from the great struggle of their ancestors.

"Given the strange power of Jamaica to erase its history,"[5] I genuinely hope Maroon history will not become victim, but will continue to be expanded. For as Dr. Lumsden said, "The information is there, nobody has hidden it. It's just that people haven't looked for it."

So let's start looking.