

# The Royalist Maroons of Jamaica in the British Atlantic World, 1740-1800

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## Os Quilombolas Monarquistas da Jamaica no Mundo Atlântico Britânico, 1740-1800

RUMA CHOPRA<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4838-4678>

<sup>1</sup>San Jose State University

One Washington Square, San Jose, California, 95192, USA

[ruma.chopra@sjsu.edu](mailto:ruma.chopra@sjsu.edu)

**ABSTRACT** This paper explores how one community of ex-slaves, the Trelawney Town Maroons of northern Jamaica, survived slavery and exile by siding with the interests of the British Empire. Jamaica, like other New World slave societies, produced runaways; when these runaway slaves established separate and autonomous long-lasting communities, they were called Maroons. Isolation protected Jamaica's Maroons from slavery but also prevented them from partaking in the prosperity of the growing British Empire. In 1740, after years of guerilla warfare with the colonial elite, the island's six Maroon groups signed treaties in which they accepted the planter regime. They chose to use their guerilla experience on behalf of the planter class, not against it. In exchange for their own autonomy, they became slavecatchers, and prevented other slaves from establishing new Maroon communities. But decades of loyalty did not safeguard the largest group of Maroons, the Trelawney Town Maroons, from banishment. In 1796, after a violent war, the colonial government summarily deported them to British Nova Scotia. After four years in Nova Scotia, the 550 Trelawney Town Maroons relocated to Sierra Leone. Despite their deportation, the Maroons continued to

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view themselves as a privileged group in Nova Scotia and in Sierra Leone, and they did everything possible to revitalize their loyalty to the king, to show themselves as “useful friends” of empire. Their actions show that eighteenth-century popular royalism was sufficiently elastic to function under drastically changed conditions.

**KEYWORDS** slavery, royalism, British Empire

**RESUMO** Este artigo investiga como uma comunidade de ex-escravos, os quilombolas de Trelawney Town, do norte da Jamaica, sobreviveu à escravidão e ao exílio, aliando-se aos interesses do Império Britânico. A Jamaica, como outras sociedades escravistas do Novo Mundo, produziu fugitivos, e quando esses escravos fugidos estabeleceram comunidades separadas e autônomas de longa duração foram chamados de quilombolas. O isolamento protegeu os quilombolas jamaicanos da escravidão, mas também os impediu de participar da prosperidade do Império Britânico em expansão. Em 1740, após anos de guerrilha contra a elite colonial, seis grupos quilombolas da ilha assinaram tratados nos quais aceitavam o regime da *plantation*, optando por usar sua experiência de guerrilha em benefício dos grandes proprietários, e não contra eles. Em troca de sua própria autonomia, tornaram-se caçadores de escravos e impediram outros escravos de estabelecer novas comunidades quilombolas. Porém, décadas de lealdade não evitaram que o maior grupo de quilombolas, o de Trelawney Town, fosse banido. Em 1796, após uma guerra violenta, o governo colonial deportou-os sumariamente para a Nova Escócia britânica. Depois de quatro anos ali, os 550 quilombolas de Trelawney Town foram transferidos para Serra Leoa. Apesar da deportação, eles continuaram a se ver como um grupo privilegiado na Nova Escócia e em Serra Leoa, e fizeram o possível para revitalizar sua lealdade ao rei, para se mostrarem como “amigos úteis” do Império. Suas ações revelam que o monarquismo popular do século XVIII era suficientemente elástico para funcionar sob condições drasticamente modificadas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** escravidão, monarquismo, Império Britânico

Fugitive slaves and their descendants — also known as Maroons — lived on the peripheries of almost every slave society in the early Americas. The path to becoming a Maroon varied. Some were Maroons at birth, some were added to an existing Maroon community through capture, and others joined voluntarily. Some Maroon communities survived for decades, even centuries, while others collapsed after just weeks (Price, 1998; De Groot, 1977; Christen; Knight; De Groot, 1997; Stedman, 1988). The Maroons desired to live separately, but they could only achieve this by predatory activities. They needed women, tools, seeds, and other resources to survive, but their raids provoked planter retaliation. All slave societies employed local militia groups and even paid mercenaries, both blacks and whites, to destroy Maroon communities and to recapture the runaways. The internal wars against Maroons were so severe, and the establishment of Maroons communities so complex and difficult that good fortune as much as fortitude and organization enabled their survival (Klein, 1986, p.198).

In the British colony of Jamaica, the Maroons' autonomy over the last five decades of the eighteenth century derived from their military acumen and experience, their communities' tight clan-like organization, and most of all, their loyalty to the colonial government, and by extension to the British monarch. Yet the Maroons' independent existence remained precarious, as became evident in 1796, when the Jamaican government punished the largest Maroon community — the Trelawney Town Maroons — by banishing them from the island. These Maroons had dared to wage war against the Jamaican plantocracy.

In exile in Nova Scotia and then in Sierra Leone, the Maroons carried along with them their fearless military reputation and their habits of loyalty to white patrons — and to the British monarchy. Within a few short years, the war that had transformed the Maroons into the dangerous enemies of Jamaica and had resulted in their banishment was all but forgotten, and a heroic narrative of fearless warriors survived — and, indeed, persists to this day. Graham Dawson notes that the soldier hero is the “most durable and powerful form of idealized masculinity

within Western cultural tradition since the time of the Ancient Greeks” (1994, p.1). An explanation for the Maroons’ survival in exile must be located in three interrelated conditions: an eighteenth-century roman-ticization of “wild” and “noble” people like the “Indian Maroons”; the British dependence on trusted military auxiliaries during a moment of fierce competition with the French; and the Maroons’ readiness to defend and embrace the empire that promised them not only a superior status in relation to other subordinate people of African descent, both in the Americas and in West Africa, but also a sense of belonging. Throughout, the Maroons of Trelawney Town benefited from the military needs of an expanding empire. They adapted to alien environments and to an unimaginable exile by intensifying their loyalty to a distant British king. The Maroons remind us that the outcome of freedom for former slaves has long depended on their ability to provide proof of their loyalty to the empire, to remain a useful people (Echeverri, 2016; Blackstock; O’Gorman, 2014, p.2; Blight; Downs; Downs, 2017).<sup>1</sup>



For over eighty years — from 1655, when the British took over Jamaica, to 1740, when the Jamaican government signed peace treaties with the Maroons — the island’s sugar planters existed in an uneasy and often antagonistic relationship with the island’s Maroon communities. The

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1 Blackstock and O’Gorman remark on the transformation in understandings of loyalism: “Loyalism was once thought of by historians as a simplistic almost instinctive conservative reaction to internal political change or external military threat. However, recent historiography (...) has treated it as more complex, fluid and multi-faceted.” This essay adopts their understanding of loyalism as the “dynamic process of political response to the changing conditions of imperial governance” (BLACKSTOCK; O’GORMAN, 2014, p.263).

Maroons exploited the natural fortification of the island's elongated shape, with 150 miles of rugged terrain from east to west, to hide, and to raid plantations for food and sometimes for slave women. Although the Maroons numbers were small — about 2,000 in an island whose population comprised of 250,000 slaves, 25,000 whites, 32,000 free black and colored in 1790 — what made them particularly dangerous to white settlers was their possession of arms and military skills (Craton, 1975, p.275).<sup>2</sup> They buttressed their strength as quasi-military organizations by absorbing skilled and armed runaways.<sup>3</sup> They combated the superior military technology of the Jamaicans by relying on intelligence and provisions from slaves. They preyed on plantations and distressed settlers by plundering homes and carrying away cattle. Disguising themselves as slaves, they conveniently bartered and sold stolen wares.<sup>4</sup>

In the midst of inter-European imperial wars, Jamaican authorities grew weary of the growing expenditures for repressing their Maroon enemies. During the 1730s, the government sought instead to contain their threat. In 1739-40, the Jamaican planters drew on sixteenth-century Spanish precedents and negotiated treaties with the Maroon communities, hoping to transform longtime rebels into the King's most loyal friends (Campbell, 1992, p.86-90; Kopytoff, 1979). This accommodation rose from necessity. It seemed to the Jamaican elites that they had little choice but to reach an agreement with the troublesome Maroons; the war had cost the colony over 240,000 pounds over the previous forty

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2 Marcela Echeverri also shows the dynamism of royalism and the possibilities it opened up for otherwise marginal people. ECHEVERRI, 2016.

3 Almost 50 percent of Jamaica's slaves were in units of more than 150 so labor tasks were specialized; many slaves thus had skills. HIGMAN, 1978, p.164.

4 DALLAS, R. C. *The History of the Maroons, from their Origin to the Establishment of their Chief Tribe at Sierra Leone, Including the Expedition to Cuba for the Purpose of Procuring Spanish Chasseurs and the State of the Island of Jamaica for the Last Ten Years with a Succinct History of the Island Previous to that Period*, vol. 1. London: Frank Cass, 1968 [1803]. p.35.

years (Hamshire, 1972, p.141). Putting a stop to Maroon depredations of profitable sugar plantations with a small white militia and inexperienced blacks and colored men had proven impossible (Geggus, 1987, p.275-278). Some nonwhite militiamen were so unreliable that they reportedly kidnapped slave women or assisted in their flight!<sup>5</sup> Nor could the Jamaican elite look to British troops for their defense. British soldiers regarded service in the West Indies with dread; European soldiers died in the Caribbean at a rate of 25 percent per year, more in hospitals than in battle (Buckley, 1979, p.97).<sup>6</sup>

In the truce established by the treaties, the colonial government settled with the six Maroon communities, four smaller Maroon communities in the eastern part of the island as well as with the Trelawney and Accompong Maroons in the northern mountains. One contemporary noted that the island had conceded terms to the “wild ones.”<sup>7</sup> The treaties mandated that the Maroons live in reserved lands, away from plantations in the largely unsettled interior regions.<sup>8</sup> They had permission to cultivate coffee, cocoa, ginger, tobacco, and cotton, and to breed cattle, hogs, and goats. They could not, however, compete with plantations by cultivating sugar or disturb plantations by hunting wild hogs within three miles of a settlement. Later laws would also prohibit the Maroons

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5 See the advertisement offering “Half a Joe Reward: Supposed to be inveighled away, a Sambo Girl, about 30 to 35 years of age, named Gracey, and *that by a mulatto man named Dick, who is in the militia*” (emphasis mine), postscript, in the *The Royal Gazette* (Kingston, Jamaica), Jul 4-11, 1795, The National Library of Jamaica (Kingston).

6 See also Robert Sewell to Duke of Portland, Nov 9, 1795, Committee of Correspondence Out-Letter Book, The National Archives of Jamaica (Spanish-Town). Of course, guerilla warfare resulted in greater casualties during the Maroon War.

7 “The Importance of Great Britain Considered in a Letter to a Gentleman,” (1740), fol. 20, The Huntington Library (San Marino, California).

8 LONG, Edward. *History of Jamaica, Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002 [1774]. p.344.

from owning slaves.<sup>9</sup> The government appointed two white superintendents to live with the Maroons, to ensure that they only left their lands with permission, to hold court for punishments, and to submit a quarterly report on their situation to the government in Spanish-Town.<sup>10</sup>

The treaties between the Maroons and the colonial government went beyond a legal and political arrangement for the Maroons. The Maroons' concessions to the Jamaican government were not analogous to treaties between European powers in the Americas or in Europe. More like treaties made throughout the Americas with the Native Americans, they underscored the Maroons' debt to the king. As the treaty ceremony was described in 1803, one of the Maroon chiefs, Cudjoe, kissed the British colonel's hand and "threw himself on the ground ... kissing his feet, and asking his pardon".<sup>11</sup> The treaties also carried a supernatural weight. The Maroon chiefs — Cudjoe and Quao — took a secret blood oath promising allegiance to the British king, George II. This ritualistic oath taking, consecrated by both British blood and Maroon blood, created a permanent bond — a kinship — between the Maroons and the British monarchy and entitled the Maroons to a special audience if and when they should need this (Bilby, 2010, p.237). The blood oath ensured that the Maroons' relationship to the king derived its moral legitimacy from a higher spiritual place.<sup>12</sup> It likely allowed the Maroons — and their descendants — to sustain their faith in a faraway king for generations. As they trusted African customs and rites for the afterlife, they turned to the king to arm themselves for this life.

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9 DALLAS, R. C. *The History of the Maroons*, p.97-98.

10 DALLAS, R. C. *The History of the Maroons*, p.96. John Guthrie and Francis Saddler, and the mark of Captain Cudjoe (circle with two lines — vertically and horizontally), Mar 10, 1738/39, Agreement with Captain Cudjoe, The British Library (London).

11 DALLAS, R. C. *The History of the Maroons*, p.56.

12 The blood oath would be repeated during the war. *Supplement to The Royal Gazette*, Saturday, Apr 30, 1796 to Saturday, May 7, 1796, The National Library of Jamaica. This is akin to how the Native Americans — in Nova Scotia for example — understood their treaties with the loyalist government in the 1790s — as an abiding moral pact, and not just a legal arrangement.

In exchange for their autonomous existence, the Maroons became an auxiliary military force in Jamaica, a “mountain police” (Gardner, 1873, p.119). They collaborated with the Jamaican slave regime to preserve slavery; they policed the woods for fugitive slaves and suppressed slave rebellions. The Jamaican frontier — the inaccessible mountainous areas — henceforth became unsafe for slave runaways. In effect, the treaties turned the Maroons into an internal police force that prevented new outlaw communities from emerging in the interior. In return for their loyalty to colonial authorities, the Maroons received patronage in the form of money, clothes, guns, and cattle (Cundall, 1937, p.183).<sup>13</sup> According to the Jamaican slaveholder, Bryan Edwards, the planters understood the Maroons’ “utility,” and treated them with the “utmost kindness”; the Maroons “never asked a favour of Government or Assembly that was denied to them”.<sup>14</sup> Empowered with these resources, they charted their own role in the island, at a status above plantation slaves. A dependent relationship with the colonial elite was essential to their survival.

The colonial government dealt with the Maroons as an ethnic community. White concessions to the Maroons were built within a slave system that depended on a system of divide and rule, providing incentives for selected slaves and using coercive authority against the rest. Individual slaves were manumitted for loyal services. White masters sometimes freed their concubines and their children. Some slaves were

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13 In the 1740s, the assembly decided that “two cows should be presented to colonel Cudjoe, and two for Captain Accompong, and one for Captain Johnny, one for Captain Cuffie, one for Quaco, one for Bumbager and one for Captain Quao, with two bulls; one for Trelawney-Town and one for Accompong Town; as also a cow for each of the captains in Accompong’s Town”. John Guthrie and Francis Saddler, and the mark of Captain Cudjoe (circle with two lines — vertically and horizontally), Mar 10, 1738/39, Agreement with Captain Cudjoe, The British Library.

14 *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), Oct 20-22, 1796.



armed at the discretion of their masters. The Maroons were atypical because they operated as separate *communities*, they received land and arms, and they entered into a formal long-lasting multi-generational agreement with the Jamaican administrators.

The Jamaican government congratulated itself on the treaties with the Maroons. The single discrete act of signing the treaty had transformed dangerous enemies into loyal subjects. In so doing, the islanders had created a standing army at virtually no cost. The treaties hardened divisions between two groups of blacks whose collaboration might otherwise have challenged white rule in the island. With the Maroons acting as slave catchers, thousands of new slaves could be purchased for work in unsettled territory without worrying about slave escape or rebellion. Planters such as William Beckford expressed satisfaction with the situation: "The Rebellious Negroes still continue our fast friends & are likely to make very good subjects." He praised the "Negroes in the mountains" who added stability to the island.<sup>15</sup>

The treaties established the Maroons as an intermediate group, one whose origin lay in slavery but whose loyalty lay with the masters and the empire. Yet even as the truce institutionalized hostility between Maroons and slaves, Jamaicans could not entirely dismiss the Maroons' capacity for disorder. On the one hand, the Maroons' military abilities overawed slave resistance and facilitated the steady cultivation of new regions. White Jamaicans benefited from the Maroons' relative freedom in relation to slaves. But on the other hand, the Maroons' sense of difference from slaves created its own dangers. As Edward Long noted in 1774, the Maroons had an extreme aversion to agricultural labor; they

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15 William Beckford, Spanish-Town, Aug 19, 1741, Papers Relating to Jamaica, presented by C.E. Long, ADD MS 12431, The British Library.

were the “most unruly, insolent, stubborn and disaffected set of laborers that can possibly be introduced upon our plantations”.<sup>16</sup> The extent of Maroons’ loyalty remained in doubt; their military experience could just as easily be turned against white society. In 1760, Edwards wrote, “I observed that they were suspicious allies and would, sometime or other, become very formidable Enemies”.<sup>17</sup>

The Maroons’ attachment to the British king widened their horizons beyond the Jamaican mountains. Most slaves hated or feared them as enemies. As a visitor to Jamaica remarked, “an antipathy had always subsisted between them [slaves] and Maroons; and it is believed that none but the turbulent and desperate among them [slaves] wished well to the cause of the Maroons”.<sup>18</sup> The Maroons were Britain’s favored blacks. To conserve the king’s order, they captured and shot slaves who ran away or led rebellions in Jamaica, including those of 1760, 1761, 1765, and 1766 (Gomez, 2005, p.132). British pro-slavery proponents argued that the end of slavery would transform slaves into bloodthirsty brutes, longing for revenge and unwilling to live by the rules of colony and empire. The armed Maroons showed firsthand the loyalty of freed blacks. After the treaties, the Maroons adapted to the white world by taking the English names of white plantation owners, and the military ranks of European officers — lieutenants, captains, colonels.<sup>19</sup> Their loyalty extended from

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16 LONG, Edward. *History of Jamaica*, p.474.

17 *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), Oct 20-22, 1796.

18 GENTLEMAN, *An Account of Jamaica and Its Inhabitants by a Gentleman, Long Resident in the West Indies*. London, Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, by G. Woodfall, 1808. p.286.

19 This pattern of organization appeared with some variation in Trinidad in the early 1800s. As the Lieutenant-Governor observed, the Maroons, “besides kings, queens, princesses, and their attendants, they have their generals, colonels &c”. It does not appear that the Trelawney Town Maroons had “kings, queens and princesses.” Lieutenant Governor Hislop to Major General Beckwith, Oct 16, 1805, CO 318/29, The National Archives, Kew.

their captains and to their chiefs, and from them to a blind faith in an all-powerful king who would not fail them. Some Maroons became slaveowners. By the 1790s, over 75 percent of Maroon men had creolized by taking on the names of their white patrons (Geggus, 1987, p.275; Heuman, 1981, p.10-15).<sup>20</sup> The Maroons foreshadowed the loyalty of the black West Indian regiments that would be established by the end of the eighteenth century. As with the Maroons, the fighting slaves in the British regiments were in a superior position to farming slaves; the freedom offered to some allowed the colony to more effectively exploit the others (Buckley, 1979).



In 1795, Jamaicans' ingrained suspicion about the Maroons brought tragedy to Trelawney Town. When two Maroons were publically whipped for killing hogs in protected territory, the Maroon community protested what they considered a terrible injustice. The hardline stance of a new lieutenant-governor who had no prior experience with the Maroons escalated the situation into a drawn-out guerilla war. After eight months, in June 1796, the government rounded up and deported most of the Trelawney Town Maroons from Jamaica. The Jamaican elite had not previously worried much about a few hundred Maroons in the distant village of Trelawney Town, far from the urban centers of Spanish-Town and Kingston. But the insurrection that the Maroons launched — in the midst of the Saint Domingue Rebellion, no less — ignited fears that the slaves who comprised 90 percent of the island's population might be the next rebels. Planters worried that slaves would find common cause with the Maroons. Retaining the neutrality of the smaller Maroon communities in the island depended on a raw display of toughness.

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20 Votes of Assembly of Jamaica, Jul 28, 1795, Samuel Vaughan to Lewis Cuthbert, The National Archives of Jamaica.

Despite the treaties, the Maroons' vulnerability to the personality and power of local commanders was evident (Metcalf, 1965, p.236). Jamaica's Lieutenant-Governor, Lord Balcarres, saw no reasons to conciliate Colonel Montague James, an Akan from the region which is now Ghana, chief of the Trelawney Town Maroons for at least a decade; Balcarres believed their actions deserved no reprieve (Campbell, 1992, p.90-91).<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Balcarres utilized the powerful symbol of the king to ensure obedience of the other Maroon communities in the island. On September 30, 1795, he sermonized: "My King is the father of all good and loyal Maroons, and he has sent me here to give them protection" (Barnard, 1849, p.75).

Although the Maroons had finally surrendered, they had done so only after inflicting heavy casualties on British regulars and the white militia. Balcarres grasped at the chance to remove the Maroons permanently from Jamaica. The rebellion that erupted only months after his arrival in Kingston presented a political opportunity. A hardline stance would establish his authority as well as win the gratitude of plantation owners who feared that the Maroons would instigate a mass revolt similar to the one raging in Saint Domingue. Over the objections of the British military commander, General George Walpole, Balcarres and the Jamaican government thus banished the Maroons to a remote destination, one from which they could never return to Jamaica, Nova Scotia (Campbell, 1988).

The Trelawney Town Maroons added to the refugee population in the future Canadian province. In 1782 and 1783, Nova Scotia had received white and black loyalists from the War of American Independence. The

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21 Montague remains an enigmatic figure in the sources. According to Campbell, the Maroon War transformed Montague into a "real Maroon leader." Until that time, "his life had all the paradoxes and contradictions that Third World leaders encounter within a colonial context" (CAMPBELL, 1992).

over 30,000 black and white loyalists flocked had more than doubled the peninsula's population. But these refugees, most of modest circumstances, struggled to establish longstanding farms in rocky soil with long periods of sub-zero temperatures. Many lived a miserable existence on meager rations with little promise of prosperity, and competed with Native Americans for position and place. Some white exiles maintained close contact with family members and neighbors in the United States and grabbed any chance to return to their previous homes (Winks, 1971; Wynn, 1987; Grant, 1973).

Nova Scotia did not turn away the weary families who unexpectedly appeared in Halifax. In need of military reinforcements to counter a potential French attack, and in hope of numbers to balance the threat of the expanding United States to the south, the colony welcomed the Maroons. During a time of British-French rivalries in Saint Domingue and the North Atlantic, the Lieutenant-Governor, John Wentworth, was impressed with their hatred for the French. As importantly, Wentworth regarded the Maroons as a potential labor force, akin to the black loyalists, useful for building roads, repairing fences, and transporting goods for Nova Scotia's white loyalist elites (Chopra, 2018a, chap. 4).

The Maroons' reputation for military bravery even meant an audience with royalty. They were greeted not only by the Lieutenant-Governor but also the son of George III, Edward, Duke of Kent, who at the time was commander-in-chief of the British forces in Canada (he later became the father of Queen Victoria). These Maroons became the first group of free blacks who met British royalty. They immediately and eagerly offered their military services to the Prince. As the Prince reported, they "want to merit His Majesty's favor and forgiveness".<sup>22</sup> Although Nova Scotia did not make use of their military experience and the Prince would treat them aloofly, the Maroons sustained their attachment to his father, the king.

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22 Prince Edward to Duke of Portland, Aug 15, 1796, Colonial Office Papers, Jan to Aug, 1796, MG II N.S., "A", Vol. 123, Nova Scotia Public Archives (Halifax).

In Nova Scotia as in Jamaica, the Maroons maintained the status of loyal British subjects. However, the Nova Scotia settlers read their blackness differently than had the Jamaicans. In Nova Scotia, where slavery existed as a weak institution and blacks were an insignificant minority, the unarmed Maroons were linked to black loyalists, and at best seen as useful subordinates. As a reward for their allegiance to the British during the American Revolution, the black loyalists, mostly southern ex-slaves, had received freedom and asylum in Nova Scotia. When the Maroons arrived, about 2,000 black loyalists served as a social underclass working for white settlers. The remaining 1,000 loyalists had left for Sierra Leone in 1792. The Maroons were determined to avoid the fate of Nova Scotia's remaining black loyalists. As the loyalist Maroon, Captain Andrew Smith, anticipated in June 1797, "The governor [of Nova Scotia] has promised to write a good word to the King for our removal next year".<sup>23</sup>

The image of the Maroons as loyal warriors was reinforced by anti-slavery evangelical protestants in Britain. Imperial reformists condemned the planters' cruelty and sentimentalized the Maroons. When the Jamaican legislature balked at bearing the cost of the Maroons during their exile in Nova Scotia, they received little sympathy from anti-slavery lobbyists or the British press. Ironically, in an age of anti-slavery and humanitarianism, the dangerous enemies of Jamaica transformed into "helpless & injured" warriors in need of rescue and resettlement. Their petitions to relocate to the "warmer climate" of Sierra Leone met approval and the British government would begin making arrangements to relocate them in 1799 (Chopra, 2018a, chap. 5).

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23 Andrew Smith, from Nova Scotia, Jun 3, 1797, in Colonial Office Papers, 1798, MG II N.S. "A" Vol. 127, Nova Scotia Public Archives.

Influential abolitionists such as William Wilberforce expressed sympathy for the Maroons' plight in the British Parliament. Like other evangelicals, Wilberforce was anguished at the poverty of the human soul and sought to redeem society by reducing British brutality towards African-descended people (Green, 1985, p.184). The Maroons, advocates like Wilberforce argued, were not "robbers and murderers" but freedmen foremost, and had claim to humanity and to protection; they did not deserve to suffer under the hands of British "sportsmen" — "British subjects, British soldiers, British officers". Indeed, he accused Britain of violating the treaties which stipulated that the Maroons could only be punished for a crime by their own community.<sup>24</sup>

For their part, the Maroons were suspicious of Lieutenant-Governor Wentworth and appealed to the British military commander who had tried to prevent their deportation from Jamaica, General Walpole. As Colonel Montague petitioned in April 23, 1797, it was the Maroons' knowledge of Walpole's "goodness" that induced them to solicit his help in escaping "from our miserable situation" in Nova Scotia.<sup>25</sup> During the Maroon War, Walpole had shown respect for the bravery of Maroon warriors; their military fierceness trumped their race and had earned his respect. Remarkably, he accused the Jamaican government of criminal injustice against the Maroons in the British Parliament (Streets, 2004, p.1, p.7; Chopra, 2018a, chap. 3).

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24 *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. 32, from May 27, 1795 to March 2, 1797 (London: Hansard, 1818), p.924, 926, 928. This quote comes from the debates on Mar 21, 1796.

25 Maroons to General Walpole Apr 23, 1797, C9137, MG II N.S. "A" vol. 125, Nova Scotia Public Archives.

Undoubtedly, the Maroons benefited from an intellectual mood at a time of massive economic, social and political change which saw “primitive” societies possessing virtues which modern societies had lost (Devine, 1994, p.91).<sup>26</sup> Wilberforce and Walpole were not unique in their regard of the Maroons. Despite the fact that Maroons were considered alien and racially inferior, they remained standard bearers for long-held beliefs about the martial virtues of an “untamed” people. Romantic sensibilities found aesthetic beauty in “untamed” people of an “untamed” land; by the early nineteenth century, the novels of Sir Walter Scott would blend portrayals of heroic Highland characters with poignant descriptions of the unforgiving yet awe-inspiring scenic backdrop of “wild” regions (Streets, 2004, p.59). This mindset affected the British conceptualizations of the Maroons as distinct from slaves. The contemporary historian, Robert Dallas, observed that the Maroons maintained themselves in a state of “savage freedom”.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, they merited praise. As Edwards put it, their savagery “strengthened their frame and served to exalt them to great bodily perfection.” His description of the dignity of their bearing is striking:

Their demeanour is lofty, their walk firm, and their persons erect. Every motion displays a combination of strength and agility. Their muscles (neither hidden nor depressed by clothing) are very prominent, and strongly marked. Their sight withal is wonderfully acute, and their hearing remarkably quick.<sup>28</sup>

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26 An observation about the Highlanders’ anticipated value for the empire, made in 1739, applied equally for the Maroons: “They are a numerous and prolifick people; and if reformed in their principles and manners, and usefully employ’d, might be made a considerable Accession of Power and Wealth to Great Britain. Some Clans of Highlanders, well instructed in the Arts of War, and well affected to the Government, would make as able and formidable a body for their Country’s Defence, as Great Britain, or Switzerland, or any part of Europe, are able to produce”. This quote comes from *The Gentlemen’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* and is cited in DEVINE, 1994, p.91.

27 DALLAS, R. C. *The History of the Maroons*, p.45.

28 EDWARDS, Bryan. Observations on the Maroon Negroes of the Island of Jamaica. In: PRICE, Richard (ed.). *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Garden City, New



In the British Parliament too, Maroon sympathizers represented them as “brave men” who had made a “noble resistance;” exterminating them would “fix an indelible stain on the British character”.<sup>29</sup>

The eighteenth-century production of multivolume universal geographies ordered the world physically but also ethnically (Withers, 2000, p.68). Of course, the Jamaican mountains that were the home of the Trelawney Town Maroons were a physical reality: They were geologically distinct. But the Maroon mountains were extended to a realm of myth, a set of ideologically laden signs and images. The geography of the region piqued the Romantic interest in primitive virtues, aesthetic purity, and elevated the Maroon as a “noble savage” (Withers, 2000, p.145). The Maroons’ home in the mountains signified glamour, wildness, masculinity and surprisingly, loyalty. The hidden difficulties of the mountains created fearless warriors worthy of respect (Devine, 1994, p.96).<sup>30</sup> The Maroons’ social qualities were seen to derive from their physical environment, which geared them to be warlike (Withers, 1992, p.145; Gold; Gold, 1995, p.62). The Maroons exiled in Nova Scotia gained from these associations of soft emotions and bold actions. They became vital assets in an expanding Britain engaged in a great struggle with France for world domination, and in a Britain determined to elevate its moral capital (Brown, 2006a; Enloe, 1980).



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York: Anchor Books, 1973 [1774], p.244.

29 *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. 32, from May 27, 1795 to Mar 2, 1797 (London: Hansard, 1818), p.929. This quote comes from the debates on Mar 21, 1796.

30 As Jorge Canizares-Esguerra observes, “in the early modern period, mountains were second only to botanical gardens as sites for envisioning paradise” (CANIZARES-ESGUERRA, 2005, p.152).

In 1800, the Maroons relocated to the fledgling British settlement of Sierra Leone. A geographically dispersed empire needed colony builders and defenders in newly established settlements among hostile African and European neighbors, settlers who had a stake in the British system. In 1787 and in 1792, the British government strategically promoted the settlement of free blacks from England and Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone. An already uprooted people without means or patrons could easily be prepared for a second transplantation to British tropical settlements which whites found undesirable or fatal. The Maroons' aspirations for a niche in the empire intersected with British expansionist and anti-slavery goals in West Africa. British Sierra Leone offered the Maroons the same opportunities as in Jamaica. In both regions, they protected a minority white population against untrustworthy insiders and external competitors (Chopra, 2018b).

In 1800, when the Maroons reached Sierra Leone, the fledgling white leadership in the colony confronted armed insurrection from Nova Scotian black loyalists. In the Trelawney Town Maroons, free black families beholden to the British for delivery out of Nova Scotia, British visionaries found ideal military manpower. Indeed, the Maroons' arrival proved immediately beneficial to the twenty to thirty Europeans who supervised a settlement of three hundred Nova Scotian black loyalist families.

As they had in Jamaica since 1740 and in Nova Scotia in 1796-1799, the Maroons offered their military services and loyalty to the British establishment. They continued to regard their deportation to Nova Scotia as a betrayal by the Jamaican government and not the actions of a benevolent British king; King George had come to their rescue by removing them from Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotian insurrectionaries who settled in Sierra Leone had come from among the three thousand black loyalists who initially sought refuge in Nova Scotia after the War of American Independence.

The British had promised the free blacks land in Nova Scotia in return for their loyalty; the blacks also expected to be treated as equal to whites. Instead, for eight years, between 1783 and 1791, the Nova Scotian blacks faced the hostility of white loyalists, the impossibility of sustaining themselves on barren land, and for many who never received land, a lifetime of servitude as black servants. Terrible conditions in the British colony, along with white prejudice, led over one thousand to seek a second relocation, to Sierra Leone. Eight years later, the Maroons followed in their footsteps (Wilson, 1976; Walker, 1975; 1976a).

Sierra Leone's government disappointed Nova Scotia's black loyalists. Starting in 1794, they demanded the rights that white American patriots had demanded just twenty-five years earlier in Britain's "old thirteen" colonies in North America. In a colony with a tiny white elite, the cohesive black loyalist opposition could not be ignored. The black loyalists shared a familiarity with the ideals of the American Revolution, and with the experience of servility in Nova Scotia; they also had a deep faith in their Baptist and Methodist churches in Sierra Leone. They had transformed themselves into a settler community, one that demanded the rights owed to subjects and not the benevolence extended to the saved. The Nova Scotians' clamor for political representation and participation caught Sierra Leone's colonial leaders by surprise. Some "reliable" Nova Scotians joined the British establishment and rose within its ranks as accountants and bookkeepers. But the majority of Nova Scotian loyalists opposed any actions that reduced their political or social status (Fyfe, 1991, p.12-18).

In contrast to the Maroons, the Nova Scotian loyalists did not share a sense of indebtedness to the British monarch. Far from showing gratitude to the government, they conducted themselves like American rebels.<sup>31</sup> In 1795, they submitted a petition complaining of high prices

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31 "Substance of Report Delivered by the Court of Directors of the Sierra Leone Company to the General Court of Proprietors", 1794, p.59, The British Library.

and low wages.<sup>32</sup> The next year, they refused to sign their land grants suspecting foul play.<sup>33</sup> When they elected no European representatives in the December 1796 elections, Sierra Leone's governor compared them to reformers across the Atlantic and tellingly reported: "You see we have just the same passions in Freetown as in London and in miniature the same effects resulting from them".<sup>34</sup> The black loyalists demanded the rights entitled to free white British settlers (Wilson 1976; Walker, 1976b).

Black Nova Scotians' demands for equal status and participation came from their experiences in Sierra Leone as much as their American background. Before the Maroons' arrival in 1800, Sierra Leone's military dependence on Nova Scotians provided the settlers with important leverage; the government feared internal threat from local Africans as much as an external French attack. The official declaration of war between France and England in February 1793 had made Sierra Leone and its 1,000 settlers a low priority. British troops sailed for Saint Domingue to preserve the West Indies instead of protecting Sierra Leone. But in October 1794, the Saint Domingue rebellion spilled over to Sierra Leone. The French attacked the fragile settlement, pillaging and destroying the colony: the loss to human life was small but animals, buildings, gardens, and botanical collections were destroyed. No British troops protected the colony. The French looted and destroyed the homes and farms of the Sierra Leone Company's employees as well those of black settlers. When the French ships left after three months, the Nova Scotians regrouped and systematically rebuilt the settlement of Freetown. As the immigrants transformed into colony-builders, their tolerance of their unequal status grew yet thinner.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Zachary Macaulay, Apr 16, 1796, Macaulay Papers, The Huntington Library.

33 Journal of Zachary Macaulay, Jul 26 to Sept 26, 1796, Macaulay Papers, The Huntington Library.

34 Journal of Zachary Macaulay, Nov 30 to Dec 4, 1796, Macaulay Papers, The Huntington Library.

35 Zachary Macaulay, Apr 16, 1796, Box 19A; Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills, May 20, 1796, Macaulay Papers Box 1; Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills, Dec 1, 1797, Box 2; Zachary Macaulay, Jan 19 to May 22, 1798 Box 20A, Macaulay Papers, The Huntington Library.

By 1800, when the Maroons arrived in Sierra Leone, the Nova Scotian black loyalists took up arms and demanded greater self-government. When they protested paying dues to government on land which they regarded as their private property, they were described as “the worst of all possible subjects (...) Jacobins [who] had been trained and educated in Paris” (Walker, 1976b, p.232). The colonial government responded predictably and a pattern already well established in Jamaica was inaugurated in Sierra Leone: a black military corps was used to maintain another black group’s subservience. During most of the eighteenth century, the Maroons’ path to security and mobility came with patronage from Jamaican whites. For black loyalists of the American Revolution settled in Nova Scotia, military service was a means to secure freedom and did not translate into a lifelong commitment to the empire. In contrast, the Maroons’ Jamaican experience led them to associate freedom with military service.

The Maroons — with their reputation for tenacity and bravery and their knowledge of guerilla tactics — met the empire’s immediate military needs in Sierra Leone. As they had protected the slaveholders from slave rebels in Jamaica for decades, the Maroons would protect the Sierra Leone’s government from black loyalists. At once, the Maroon leaders inserted themselves as effective mediators: whites in Sierra Leone could trust them to reassert the king’s authority. As Colonel James Montague, the Maroon leader, explained: “They like King George and white man well — if them settler don’t like King George nor this Government — only let Maroon see them” (Campbell, 1993, p.16). Voluntary military service was a public affirmation of loyalism (Morgan; O’Shaughnessy, 2006).<sup>36</sup>

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36 The West India Regiments formed the largest slave army of any European power between 1794 and 1833. British expeditions against Spain’s Caribbean and Central America in 1740-41 also relied on the use of slaves. MORGAN; O’SHAUGHNESSY, 2006, p.185.

The Maroons embraced and manipulated their own representations as martial heroes (Streets, 2004, p.2). In an age of benevolent despotism, bearing arms for the monarchy represented an opportunity to display courage and merit, to advance socially, and to win “rudimentary respect” (Williams, 1973, p.8). They identified their interests with the empire because the empire provided rank and opportunities. As Christopher Leslie Brown notes, “arming slaves connected bondsmen more closely to established order instead of deepening alienation” (Brown, 2006b, p.341, p.346). The Maroons never strayed from the path that had earned them distinction and status in Jamaica. Indeed, for years after their arrival in Sierra Leone, they used their clan-like structure to offer themselves as a *community* of potential loyalists.

The Maroons had killed to protect the realm of King George in the Americas and they were ready to do the same to protect the British interests in West Africa. *What* exactly they protected appeared to matter less than which side they were on. In the alien world of Sierra Leone, they turned to the long familiar symbols even more fervently. In Jamaica, they protected a slave society; in Sierra Leone, they protected an anti-slavery society. Unfamiliar with the deeper circumstances surrounding the violent disturbances in Sierra Leone, the Maroons fully supported the king’s side. No one could have doubted their unconditional commitment. The Maroons’ new life away from their homes had not shaken their attachment to the British king or empire. Rather, deprived of the familiar terrain and known networks, the migrations — for the time being at least — *intensified their tendencies* towards monarchical loyalism. Without knowledge of the mountains of Sierra Leone or inter-imperial and African-European dynamics, and without protection from known kinship and patronage networks, the Maroons’ lifeline was their royalism.

A variety of British writers and evangelicals regarded the Maroons as loyal warriors within the framework of an earlier benevolent monarchy under collapse since the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions.

One state paper in 1797 emphasized that the Highlanders were “strangers to the levelling and dangerous principles of the present age” (quoted in Devine, 1994, p.92). This, the Sierra Leone government gambled, appeared to apply equally to the Maroons. At a time of radical unrest and republican sentiment, the Maroons — unlike Nova Scotia’s black loyalists — could be trusted to bear weapons.

Indeed, the same Sierra Leone government that was ready to gamble on the Maroons’ loyalty in 1799-1800 had refused to do so three years earlier. When the British government proposed sending the Maroons to Sierra Leone in July 1796, in the aftermath of the Jamaican Maroon War, Sierra Leone’s leaders opposed the Maroon settlement. Although they badly needed more settlers, they regarded the Maroons’ military background as a threat to the fledgling colony. They worried that the Maroons and Nova Scotians would join to topple white government in Sierra Leone. But in 1799, the colony negotiated a subsidy from the government to settle the Maroon families. The Maroons’ peaceable and grateful behavior in Nova Scotia — arguably performed precisely for this effect — had quieted worries. Sierra Leone gambled that a group of 150 Maroon guerrilla fighters could quiet the militant Nova Scotian blacks whose military skills did not match their ideological shrillness. They would be proved right.



In contrast to their steadfast loyalty to the British Empire, the Maroons’ deference to their leader, Colonel Montague James, loosened in exile. Prior to their banishment, the colonel had served as the leader of the Trelawney Town Maroons for at least two decades, working directly under the patronage of the white superintendent. The respect given to him by younger generations appeared to come from his age as well as his military experience. His exact age is not known but he was considered “very old” in Sierra Leone in 1800 and he had been described

as “white-haired” and old since at least the 1790s. He had maintained his influence in Jamaica in part because he could supply luxuries in feasts and festive occasions: rum, wild-boar, land-crabs, pigeon and fish (Hamshire, 1972, p.142).<sup>37</sup> Outside of Jamaica, he could secure no favors for the Maroons. Without resources at his disposal, the colonel’s role weakened. Already in Nova Scotia, the colonel increasingly shared this authority. In 1797 and 1798, in the petitions that the Maroons sent to the King and Parliament from Nova Scotia, the signees included four captains as well as the colonel.<sup>38</sup>

In Sierra Leone, the colonel’s symbolic role was apparent, and outlasted his actual influence. Within days of reaching Sierra Leone, the colonel again spoke on behalf of the Maroons, agreeing to fight against the Nova Scotian loyalists. The British government recognized him and singled him out as the representative voice for the community. Amongst the neighboring Africans, the colonel also held high standing: he signified a well-understood role. Like the Maroons, African leaders held in high esteem “good knowing and elderly persons.” The Temne chief, King Tom, would make a special visit to see the colonel in 1801. For a full decade after the Maroons’ arrival in Sierra Leone, the British government continued to provide relief to him — a place to live and a small annual subsidy. In British eyes, he remained a central figure, the intermediary through which they talked to the Maroons. Hence, he earned a greater regard than other Maroons and a more secure income. But his role had shifted. The 200 pounds that he received annually in Jamaica had acknowledged his stature in the Maroon community. The 50 pounds that he was granted in Sierra Leone signaled his lack of influence; it was a gesture of goodwill towards one who had long been faithful (Campbell, 1992, p.90).<sup>39</sup>

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37 In 1802, Gen. Nugent visited the Maroons of Moore Town and Charles Town in Portland parish, Jamaica; they entertained him with feasts of jerked and barbequed hog, plantains and yams. HAMSHIRE, 1972, p.142.

38 It is possible that some older Maroon men did not leave Jamaica in 1796.

39 George Ross to Council, May 27, 1801, CO 270/6, The National Archives, Kew.



Colonel Montague James could not hold the esteem of the Maroon community in exile. His origin as a leader had emerged from his military experience in Jamaica and his favored treatment by whites. Despite his title, Montague James received less weight for his experience and age without the accompanying military might, and especially without his ability to add to Maroon resources. The deportation equipped younger Maroon captains to directly deal with the colonial government, because they spoke better English, for example. The exclusive patronage accorded to the colonel by the white superintendent in Jamaica had no corollary outside that context. There was a clear devolution of the colonel's authority. In Nova Scotia, he went from being the only spokesman for the Maroons to becoming one of the spokesmen. In Sierra Leone, when the Maroons once again sent a petition to the British government in 1805, asking about their brethren still in Jamaica, he was no longer among the signees.<sup>40</sup>

The declining authority of the old patriarch Montague James suggests a reconfiguration of the Maroon community in Sierra Leone. Instead of seeking a return to a deference-based model of authority, the Maroons, like the black loyalists before them, moved towards a less dependent relationship towards established elders. Their exceptional energy responded to exceptional circumstances. In a sense, they were ideally suited to this. As much as a micro-community founded on self-reliance and self-defense, they were also a loose group long responsive to changing conditions of security.

Montague James' central role did not disappear suddenly; it gave way in slow motion. Importantly, no one replaced or even discussed replacing him — he was the last leader of the Trelawney Town Maroons. No one usurped his place in Nova Scotia or in Sierra Leone. But the Maroons no longer viewed him as a necessary spokesman. Miniaturized

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40 Captain Andrew Smith and Captain Charles Schaw (Maroons) to Colonel William Dawes Quarrell, Feb 24, 1805, WO 1/352, The National Archives, Kew.

by the context, he became less relevant. Without the need to maintain a defensive military alertness, and without a dependence on Montague James to provide them relief from poverty or slavery, the Maroons evolved towards the patterns set by the black loyalists. In 1795, in the first stages of the Maroon War, one Maroon woman — “the bolder sister of a bold maroon” adopted the title of “Queen of Montego Bay” (Montego Bay was the second largest port in the island, very close to Trelawney Town). In choosing this title, the Maroon woman revealed something about the nature of Maroon royalism in Jamaica. The Maroons did not see themselves as hopelessly beholden, or permanently subservient to the king. The announcement of a Queen represented as much a bold embrace of power as it did a desire for integration into the empire. The Maroon woman borrowed from royalism to imagine a world in which a Maroon Queen would rule over the richest slave-owning colony in the empire. This form of royalism was inconceivable in Sierra Leone by 1800.<sup>41</sup>

Freed from their precarious role in the margins of Jamaica, the most aspiring Maroon men opted to advance in the British world in *individual* terms. Out of sheer necessity, the British in Sierra Leone allowed the Maroons maneuverability to participate in economic activities. The tropical climate had practical implications for imperial policy. Some regions were “white man’s country” and others were not. But loyalists were needed everywhere that the British empire laid its claims.

The Maroons’ familiarity with British norms became indispensable. In Jamaica, their African ancestry had placed them in a disadvantageous situation, unable to advance beyond a certain limit. In Sierra Leone, their value — with or without Montague James — was higher than the local Africans. Some Maroons took advantage of the weak

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41 Supplement to *The Royal Gazette* (Kingston, Jamaica), April 30–May 7, 1796, The National Library of Jamaica.

British position in West Africa to offer themselves as military auxiliaries, opting for status through success in battle and preparing for plunder as their reward. Others took a different route: They sought schooling, training, and a higher standard of living, a non-military life. Maroon men sought to live with a new dignity: They became clerks, and sent their children to church. In 1849, an unnamed “Lady” visitor to Sierra Leone provided a rare view of the Maroons almost five decades after their initial arrival there. She observed that the Maroons considered anything in the “shape of menial capacity as utterly beneath them” and regularly employed emancipated Africans as apprentices. They professed the Christian religion and displayed “conceit in overrating their abilities and pretensions.” Over time, the Maroons would share the consumption patterns of other British subjects, acquiring clothes, housing, furniture, and especially imported goods. But some Maroons, it seemed, preserved a certain distinctness. The “Lady” left an extraordinary image of one “pleasant-tempered and kind-hearted” Maroon woman who had a “passion for ornaments.” She wore “lots of chains — necklace of large rough pieces of coral, another of smaller beads of the same bring substance, one of oval lumps of amber nearly as large as a hen’s egg and sundry strings of variously colored glass beads, appeared by turns round the kerchiefless and wrinkled neck”.<sup>42</sup> The Maroons’ royalism adapted to fit their complex aspirations (Chopra, 2018a, chap. 8).

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42 *Residence at Sierra Leone*, Letter XVI, 1849, fols. 33, 275, Huntington Library, San Marino.

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