

# THE DEPORTATION OF THE MAROONS OF TRELAWNY TOWN TO NOVA SCOTIA, THEN BACK TO AFRICA

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**Maroons were those Blacks** who fled plantation slavery to establish their own communities in inhospitable and isolated areas and who fought to maintain their freedom. Maroon societies existed throughout both North America and South America, wherever slave systems existed. In their attempt to survive the struggle to maintain freedom, the Maroons devised methods of subsistence, military strategies, systems of shared authority, and shared languages. The greatest successes of the Maroons are recognized in their military ability and leadership (Bryan, 1865, p. 108; Kushner et al., 1865).

The Maroons were the slave masters' worst nightmare because of their raids of the plantations to take supplies such as food, ammunition, cattle, horses, and slave women. All of what the Maroons did not take they would destroy by fire—the crops, livestock, barns, and so forth. The Maroons' familiarity with the terrain and the thick forest cover of the country was a valuable asset, enabling them to evade capture and making it possible for them to divert their attacks to other sections of the country, robbing and killing their enemies. They presented so formidable an opposition that an appreciable number of plantations had to be abandoned (Dallas, 1803, Vol. 1; Long, 1774, Vol. 2, pp. 302-345).

The Maroons clearly became the front-line fighters in the struggle against slavery. Before any known struggles for independence in the New World, Maroon communities had developed strong



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ideas and strategies for self-sufficiency, self-help, and self-reliance, and they fought with great skill and courage for the right to self-determination (Edwards, Vol. 1, p. 527). The communities managed to unite people who had come from many different backgrounds and regions of the world, speaking different languages and practicing diverse customs and traditions. African traditions featured prominently in the formation and transformation of the way of life of these groups throughout the period of their struggle (Edwards, p. 528).

In Jamaica, the development, growth, and survival of Maroon societies provided a cultural link between the indigenous societies and the Spanish on one hand and the English on the other. This is historically significant because it indicates that the history of the Maroons of Jamaica is not only the most important link, but has become and remains in its entirety a part of the historical period (Long, 1774, Vol. 2, p. 463).

Today, the Maroons do not accept that they were defeated by the British military forces (Long, 1774, Vol. 2, pp. 445, 450-451). The Maroons faced forces backed by the largest and most successful colonial power of the time. They knew their strength. They knew the strength of their adversary and planned all their strategies around that knowledge. Their strategy at the inception of the war was to maintain their freedom and autonomy at all cost (Dallas, 1803, Vol. 1, pp. 124-125). In fact, they had resolved themselves to die fighting or commit mass suicide rather than surrender, as the Maroons of the "Famous Republic of Palmares," or "Black Troy" of Brazil had done in 1697 (Chapman, 1918; Diggs, 1953, pp. 66-68).

The majority of the Maroons in the West Indies came from West Africa, and the highest percentage of them were Ashantis who ultimately were taken to Jamaica by the Spaniards. Upon escaping from the plantations and becoming Maroons, the former slaves would solemnly vow never to be slaves again, or, in the face of imminent capture, vow never to be taken alive (Dallas, 1803, Vol. 1, p. 154). The protracted struggle between the Maroons and the British culminated in a stalemate. The British, the world's greatest colonial power with a great military, did not achieve its objective of re-enslaving the Maroons, but instead lost a great number of men

and amount of money, whereas the Maroons stood by their word and maintained their freedom.

The Maroons considered the outcome of their fight against the British a victory because they had denied victory to a military force far superior to theirs. The victory of the Maroons had far-reaching implications for world history. First, for Black people throughout the world, it established the fact that slavery was not an acceptable condition of life. Second, compliance might have eased the conscience of those devout men in England, such as Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, and William Wilberforce, leaders of the British antislavery movement, who argued for the abolition of slavery, and allowed their tacit support. Unequivocal repudiation of slavery by the Maroons was, indeed, one of the principal factors that sustained the abolitionist movement as well as the source of inspiration for the front-line fighters of slavery. The inability and, quite possibly, impossibility of the British military to defeat the Maroons, who caused constant threats and destruction on the plantations, was one of the chief reasons the British ended slavery throughout her Empire in 1833.

Two Maroon wars were fought, the first between 1725 and 1740 (which has been regarded as one of the three major slave revolts and the most serious on the island) and the second in 1795-1796. At the conclusion of the first series of Maroon-British confrontations, in 1738 and 1739, two treaties were concluded, assigning the Maroons more than 1,500 acres of land, a quasi-autonomous state, and the Trelawny Maroons had to hunt for and return runaway slaves; thus, they made themselves enemies of the slaves on the plantations who lost the option to run away and set up communities similar to those of the pretreaty Maroons (Eyre, 1980; Furness, 1965; Peterson, 1970; Schuler, 1970; Wright, 1923, 1970, pp. 5-27). The result of the second treaty was that the Maroon communities in Jamaica, which hitherto had been a haven for fugitive slaves, were pressed into action on behalf of the slave masters with a view to serving the ends of the slave system. Accordingly, the Maroons were very active as slave catchers during numerous slave revolts. One revolt in which the Maroons played a leading part in its suppression was that of 1760 (regarded as another of the major

Jamaican slave revolts). The Jamaican Maroons, therefore, played the role of slave catchers and suppressors of slaves, unlike Maroons in other areas of the West Indies and Latin America. Yet, there were indications that Maroons discharged their responsibilities of the second treaty in a half-hearted, far from satisfactory manner (Dallas, 1803, Vol. 1, pp. 122-123). Sir Edward Trelawny, Governor of Jamaica, asked the Maroons to become friends of the government. Some responded positively to his call, whereupon a section of land was set aside for them that was named in honor of the governor—Trelawny Town (Eyre, 1980, pp. 5-18).

According to R. C. Dallas, the Maroons' failure to adhere to the terms of the second treaty involving catching and returning runaway slaves was a factor that brought the slave masters into a combination, because they understood the compromised position of the Maroons and progressively exploited the situation. They flagrantly renege and encroached on the treaty arrangements, resulting in the second Maroon War (1795-1796), in which the Trelawny Maroons (the largest group stood alone) declared war on the British. The Trelawny Maroons went on a bloody rampage of killing, plundering, and burning that resulted in the death of many people and farm animals, and the destruction of a large number of farms (Dallas, Vol. 1, pp. 122-123). Quite apprehensive, Alexander Lindsay, the Duke of Balcarres, the Governor of Jamaica in 1796, was determined to save the island from the Maroons' destructiveness; his prescription for this was a simple one: it was to deport the Trelawny Town Maroons, in spite of the fact that they had laid down their arms under pledge that they would not be deported from the colony. The sacred vow was made between his commanding officer, General George Walpole, and Colonel Montague James, Chief of the Maroons. The Duke of Balcarres considered the treaty a meaningless ploy.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the Maroons laid down their arms, they were transported to Port Royal and then immediately corralled into two transport vessels that were conveniently lying in that harbor. Having not decided on where the Maroons would be sent, the Lieutenant Governor urged that they be sent away with dispatch.<sup>2</sup> He complained to William Henry Bentinck, Duke of Portland, the Secretary of States for the Colonies, that he did not know at that time where the

Maroons would be sent. He considered New Brunswick, Sierra Leone, and the Bahamas.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the governor's perception of the necessity for removing them for security considerations, he also pointed out that maintaining the Maroons on two ships in the harbor was too costly, and the dwindling provisions would ultimately jeopardize all their lives. Thus, fully realizing the ominous and imminent threat posed by the continuing presence of the Maroons of Trelawny Town, albeit packed on two ships anchored in the harbor at Port Royal, worsening conditions moved toward setting the stage for a mutiny, a possibility the governor most feared. He was anxious and desperate to get the Maroons as far from Jamaica as possible, as quickly as possible. He was so hell-bent on getting them out that he urged that the Maroon-packed ships sail out to sea promptly, omitting the fact that he had not decided on the place where the Maroons would be located.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Governor Lindsay hastily conferred with Admiral Parker, in charge of the fleet of the Royal Navy stationed at Jamaica.<sup>5</sup> The decision was made to take the Trelawny Town Maroons to Nova Scotia, just as the American Negroes who fought on the side of the British during the American Revolution were taken in 1783.

Governor Lindsay set in motion the process of deporting the Maroons, with the exception of the Duke of Portland, the Secretary of States for the Colonies, because he believed his responsibility required him to get the Maroons off the island as expeditiously as possible, without confronting obstacles such as lengthy governmental procedures. Furthermore, Governor Lindsay did not consult with King George III, the British Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Henry Addington, nor the Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir John Wentworth, who was not informed of the Maroons' deportation to his island until the Maroons had been at sea 26 days.<sup>6</sup> Governor Lindsay succeeded in getting the House of Assembly in Jamaica to hurriedly (May 1, 1796) enact a deportation law designed to remove the Maroons of Trelawny Town from the island.<sup>7</sup> He believed he should act quickly, circumvent rules and regulations, get the Maroons away from Jamaica, and then inform the appropriate officials of his deeds, which is precisely what he did.<sup>8</sup> He did not fear punishment by the British government, but

expected appreciation and commendation after they received his full and clear explanation of his deportation of the Trelawny Town Maroons.<sup>9</sup> In addition, as a result of the Trelawny Town Maroons' most violent rebellion against the government and the people of Jamaica in August 1975, a rebellion that struck utter fear in the hearts and minds of all non-Maroons on the island of Jamaica, he believed that getting the Maroons out was desired by the British government as well as the people of Jamaica. Thus, he believed under no circumstances would he execute an order to bring the Maroons back to Jamaica.

The governor of Jamaica did become somewhat concerned about the flurry of questions raised both in Britain and on the island of Jamaica about the legality of deporting the Trelawny Maroons. Meanwhile, the Trelawny Maroons had resigned themselves to deportation.<sup>10</sup> Governor Lindsay did not misrepresent their situation when he mentioned their unpopularity with a large section of the Jamaican society.<sup>11</sup> In fact, in his communication with officials in Britain and on the island of Jamaica, he asserted that if the Trelawny Maroons were brought back to Jamaica they would be torn to pieces by the people, or such a clamor would be created that it would lead to adopting the most violent means of enforcing plans to get rid of them and send them away. The Maroons were aware of the aforementioned and in the atmosphere of tense expectancy, they sent two diplomatic petitions to Governor Lindsay, well aware that their deportation was an act of betrayal. But they were a realistic people who fully understood the people's animosity against them. They were prepared to bide their time. They were even prepared at that point to show humility and contrition.<sup>12</sup> Implicated in this situation was a treaty between the Maroons and the British. Created in an effort to halt the onslaught of the Maroons, the British had negotiated peace with the Maroons that resulted in a treaty that induced them into laying down their arms under pledge that they would not be deported from Jamaica (Edwards, Vol. 1, pp. 532-535). Realizing the governments of both Britain and Jamaica rejected the treaty between their chief, Colonel Montague James and the Commander-in-Chief of the British military forces at Jamaica, General George Walpole, Maroons sent a petition to Jamaica's

Governor Lindsay acknowledging their violence against the people of Jamaica, their understanding of the rejection of the treaty, and the people's bitterness and fear of them; furthermore, they fully understood why they were being taken away from Jamaica. So, in view of the previous statement, the Maroons humbly requested that they be sent to another colony of the British empire where they would have the opportunity to prove the sincerity of their repentance and to prove themselves faithful subjects. The Maroons' first petition was couched in delicate language designed to get the British government to have mercy on them, empathize with them, and perhaps, eventually return them to Trelawny Town or a new territory in the Blue Mountains.<sup>13</sup>

Two weeks later, the Trelawny Maroons sent a second petition, directly to the Duke of Portland, William Henry Bentinck, Secretary of States for the Colonies through Governor Lindsay, who was quite pleased with it.<sup>14</sup> In the second petition, the Maroons expressed their understanding of the impossibility of remaining in Jamaica because of the bitterness and resentment of the Whites and people of color (Mulattos) against them that resulted from the "reign of terror" they committed on the people in August 1795.<sup>15</sup> The Maroons acknowledged the statute passed by the General Assembly of Jamaica that stipulated they be taken off the island, relocated, and not returned. If they returned and were caught, they quickly would be put to death without the benefit of clergy.<sup>16</sup> Fully realizing they were permanently barred from Jamaica, they requested the Duke of Portland to settle them somewhere in the Empire, and, if he could not, they were willing to serve in the British military, provided their old men, women, children, and the wives and children of the Maroon soldiers were protected and supported by the government, enabling them to live comfortably.<sup>17</sup>

The decision to send the Trelawny Maroons to Nova Scotia was made before the petition was received. Quite possibly, it was based on the fact that in 1783, some 1,200 former American slaves who gained their freedom by fighting on the British side during the American Revolution were taken to Nova Scotia. After staying there for 9 years, the Negroes seized the opportunity to go to Sierra Leone to gain homesteads, something they found difficult during

their stay in Nova Scotia because of the intolerance of Tory émigrés. The Trelawny Maroons were put on board the ship (the *Dover*) that transported them to Nova Scotia in April 1796, although they did not set sail until May 8 of the same year. Governor Lindsay did not inform the Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir John Wentworth of the matter until June 3. When the Maroons landed at Halifax (the capital of Nova Scotia) on July 22 and 23, it meant they had been at sea for more than 2 months. The letter did not reach Governor Wentworth until well into August; thus, he was presented with a matter that probably could not be reversed.<sup>18</sup>

Climactically, the Maroons arrived in Nova Scotia at a propitious time, for it was during July when the weather was warm and pleasant,<sup>19</sup> but problems developed after their first winter, which was considered the longest and most severe since the British settlement of Nova Scotia in 1649 (Borrett, 1944, p. 33). The Maroons were quite disturbed by the terrible winter, for which they were totally unaccustomed. When they saw snow falling and covering the ground, and the water around them, where they had been doing their fishing, hardening, they were truly shocked. As the winter continued seemingly forever, they decided that Nova Scotia was no place for Maroons; from that moment, they refused to cooperate with Governor Wentworth's efforts at settling them, and once again the Maroons became most unpopular (Borrett, 1944).

The Maroons considered Nova Scotia their "Siberia," and consequently, through a series of petitions and memoranda to the authorities in Nova Scotia and Britain, including one to King George III, all requested their removal to a place with a climate similar to that of Jamaica.<sup>20</sup> Finally, after 3½ years of pleading and begging, the 538 Trelawny Maroons were taken to Sierra Leone, where, 8 years earlier, 1,200 former slaves who sided with the British during the American Revolution War, slaves mainly from Georgia and South Carolina, had been taken to Nova Scotia. After 9 difficult years there, at their request, they were taken to Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, the Maroons became significantly involved in helping to develop the colony that one day would become the nation of Sierra Leone. In fact, the successful settlement of Sierra Leone by the American Colonization Society became the model for the settling

of free Blacks from America in a place that would become known as Liberia some 14 years later.

### NOTES

1. Letter of Governor Lindsay to the Secretary of States for the Colonies, William Bentinck (1796, January 30). This and all letters cited in this article are available from the Colonial Office papers in the Public Records Office, Kingston, Jamaica.
2. Letter of Governor Lindsay (1796, January 30).
3. Letter of Governor Lindsay (1796, January 30).
4. Letter of Governor Lindsay (1796, January 30).
5. Letter of Governor Lindsay (1796, January 30).
6. Letter of Governor Lindsay to Sir John Wentworth of Nova Scotia (1796, June 3).
7. Letter of the Jamaica House of Assembly. The Act of Deportation, 36 George III, xxxiii-1-2.
8. Letter of Governor Lindsay to Sir John Wentworth (1796, June 3).
9. Letter of Governor Lindsay to Sir John Wentworth (1796, June 3).
10. Letter: the Maroons' petition to Governor Lindsay (1796, April 27).
11. Letter: the Maroons' petition to Governor Lindsay (1796, April 27).
12. Letter: the Maroons' petition to Governor Lindsay (1796, April 27).
13. Letter: the Maroons' petition to Governor Lindsay (1796, April 27).
14. Letter: the Maroons' petition to the Secretary of States for the Colonies, William Bentinck (1796, May 10).
15. Letter: the Maroons' petition to the Secretary of States for the Colonies, William Bentinck (1796, May 10).
16. Letter: the Maroons' petition to the Secretary of States for the Colonies, William Bentinck (1796, May 10).
17. Letter: the Maroons' petition to the Secretary of States for the Colonies, William Bentinck (1796, May 10).
18. Letter of Governor Lindsay to Governor Sir John Wentworth of Nova Scotia (1796, June 3).
19. Letters to *The Halifax Journal* (1796, July 21) and *The Weekly Chronicle*, Halifax, (1796, July 23).
20. Letters of Governor Sir John Wentworth to the Secretary of States for the Colonies, William Bentinck (1796, October 29; 1797, April 21 and June 2).

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