
THE MAROONS AND MOORE TOWN

Colonel C.L.G. Harris

When the famous navigator, Christopher Columbus, reached Jamaica on May 4, 1494, he found Arawak Indians there — gentle, peaceful aborigines. These people were put to unaccustomed hard work and this resulted in a dramatic decrease in their numbers. At this point a plea was made on their behalf by Bartholome de las Casas who asked the Spanish authorities to replace them with African workers who, he claimed, were better suited for such strenuous labor. What “the Apostle of the Indians” failed to understand was that slavery was an evil irrespective of the tribe or nation involved. His advice was accepted, and soon men and women were wrenched from their homeland in West Africa to become slaves in Jamaica.

On May 10, 1655, a British military force under Admiral Penn and General Venables landed in Jamaica and captured it. At the end of the action the black bondsmen took themselves to the mountains, where they made their pledge never to be slaves again — a pledge destined to remain secure in a sanctum of inviolability — and soon war between them and the British became inevitable. After more than 80 years of warfare, they were approached by the British on a mission of peace. And so in 1739, a peace treaty was drawn up. By virtue of the treaty, they received among other benefits tax-free lands in different parts of the island where succeeding generations have since lived continuously. These are the Maroons of Jamaica.

The Moore Town Maroons are considered special in comparison with their counterparts in other sections of Jamaica, and the following are some reasons for this, not necessarily in order of their importance. 1) The acreage of land they own exceeds by far that of any other such community. 2) The Maroon language, Kromanti — an equivalent of the Asante Twi of Ghana — is better known among them than in the other communities. 3) Their wizardry with the ambush — the camouflage created by Grandy Nanny and her warriors — is to this day a concept unattainable by others. 4) In the manufacture of their drums, only material actually grown in their territory is used — apart from the goatskin, on occasion. 5) Their Kromanti Dance is one of inherent seriousness; it is never frivolous, even when done for the sole purpose of entertainment. 6) No colonel or chief (these terms are interchangeable) of Moore Town has ever sought the office — each has been taken unawares when asked to accept the position; on every occasion there has been election by acclamation. 7) From almost every sector of the world messages extolling their warm hospitality are constantly being received by the Maroons of Moore Town. 8) The community of Moore Town was founded by the legendary Grandy Nanny, now a Jamaican National Hero — the greatest Maroon leader ever to set foot on Jamaican soil

— from whom descended the most notable line of families in its population.

Often in interviews the question has been asked of me, “What does it mean to you to be a Maroon today?” When it is considered that Grandy Nanny, Kojo, Accompong and others of our leaders prevailed against the forces of a kingdom that ruled more than a quarter of all the lands on earth, then the pride of their Maroon posterity can be understood and appreciated. Yet these physical victories gave rise to other victories of deep moral, psychological and spiritual significance which increased that pride and its concomitant thankfulness a hundred-fold. If the Maroons had been defeated, meaningful black resistance to the indignity and cruelty of African slavery would have ended — at least for a season — and so even today the cries of the tortured might still have been heard on the plantations, in the dungeons and from myriad village squares across the world. The knowledge that the Mother of my fathers, from her base in little Jamaica, burst asunder the prison bars of black bondage means more to me than life itself. It is like a sacrament taken daily as I kneel in humility at the feet of Nyankopon (The Creator) in the peaceful evening hour. Nyame adom (Thank God), I would not change my Maroon Heritage for occupancy of the White House nor the grandeur of the British Throne.

It is most important to understand that these people brought language, culture and extra-sensory attributes from *Mother Africa* some five centuries ago which survived the vicissitudes of existence in what was once a ‘strange land’ — an *inhospitable environment* — and they are dedicated to the preservation of all that is best in their past. And though extremely poor in terms of dollars and cents they refuse to be mendicants or ciphers in a ruthless political game. Thus our vast potential for the greater good of humanity awaits the coming day when some wise, decent gentleman or lady will join us in developing our assets to his or her benefit and ours.

The Maroon Story — an odyssey of courage and endurance — is sublimely inspirational in testifying to the fact that mortals may, by fixity of purpose, strength of character, and constancy of faith, rise from the purely physical plane where circumscription is dominant, to the yet unexplored heights of the spiritual, where the horizons are illimitable; where wonders are wrought; where there is communion and fellowship with the souls of departed heroes, and angels minister to the needs of men; whence the armies of Bondage are broken and overcome. This inspiration reflects eternal sunshine on the faces of men and women kneeling at the feet of The Infinite as they prepare to offer their lives, if necessary, for that freedom without which life is death.

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