away from European farms as the crow flies, but the forest and hills were impenetrable enough to conceal their location. The Portuguese constantly hunted the runaways, but they also traded with them—Calabar's residents, four miles from the center of Salvador, exchanged dried fish, manioc (cassava), rice, and palm oil for knives, guns, and cloth. In 1888 Brazil finally abolished slavery, yet life in its *quilombos* showed little improvement. They were still regarded as illegal squatters' settlements. But the government was too weak to do much about them.

In the 1950s and 1960s Salvador grew enormously. Urban pseudopods reached over the ridges, engulfing Calabar, Liberdade, and half a dozen other *quilombos.* But these fugitive settlements never fully became part of the city—nobody had legal title to the land. Few roads entered Calabar. Sewer lines were routed around its borders. People had to steal electric power with jury-rigged hookups. By 1985, when Christian was born, the former hideaway was completely surrounded by high-rise apartments.

When I met Christian, he was kind enough to take Susanna Hecht—the UCLA geographer, who was generously sharing her linguistic and historical expertise—and me around his childhood home. The entry was a narrow, unmarked stairway. Bootleg electrical connections made snarls of wire along

Tucked behind a wall of high-rise apartments in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Salvador, Brazil, the hidden city of Calabar was founded four centuries ago by escaped slaves and still is only weakly attached to the larger urban complex.

the walls. Houses staggered up the ridge, linked by crumbling concrete paths. There were almost no cars. At the bottom of the hill the streets were crowded with promenading people and music was in the air as in other Salvadoran neighborhoods. Teenagers in white clothing were practicing capoeira, the Afro-Brazilian dance that is also a martial art. Banners touting neighborhood programs hung over the street. Here and there new streetlights gleamed. It was a living community, or so it seemed to me, a city within a city.

Calabar and Liberdade are not unique. Thousands of fugitive communities dotted Brazil, much of the rest of South America, most of the Caribbean and Central America, and even parts of North America—more than fifty existed in the United States. Some covered huge areas and fought colonial governments for decades. Others hid in wet forests in the lower Amazon, central Mexico, and the U.S. Southeast. All were scrambling to create free domains for themselves—"inventing liberty," in the phrase of the Brazilian historian João José Reis. They have been called by a host of names: *quilombos,* yes, but also *mocambos, palenques,* and *cumbes.* In English they are usually called "maroon" communities—the term apparently comes, poignantly, from *símaran,* the Taino word for the flight of an arrow.

American history is often described in terms of Europeans entering a nearly empty wilderness. For centuries, though, most of the newcomers were African and the land was not empty, but filled with millions of indigenous people. Much of the great encounter between the two separate halves of the world thus was less a meeting of Europe and America than a meeting of Africans and Indians—a relationship forged both in the cage of slavery and in the uprisings against it. Largely conducted out of sight of Europeans, the complex interplay between red and black is a hidden history that researchers are only now beginning to unravel.

Even when schoolbooks do acknowledge the hemisphere's majority populations, they are all too often portrayed solely as helpless victims of European expansion: Indians melting away before the colonists' onslaught, Africans chained in plantations, working under the lash. In both roles, they have little volition of their own—no *agency,* as social scientists say. To be sure, slavery forced millions of Africans and Indians into lives of misery and pain. Often those lives were short: a third to a half of Brazil's slaves died within four to five years. More still died on the journey within Africa to the slave port, and on the passage across the Atlantic. Yet people always seek ways to exert their will, even in the most terrible circumstances. Africans and Indians fought with each other, claimed to be each other, and allied together for common goals, sometimes all at the same time. Whatever their tactics, the goal was constant: freedom.

More often than is commonly realized they won it. Slaves vanished from the ken of their masters by the tens or even hundreds of thousands in Brazil, Peru, and the Caribbean. Spain recognized autonomous maroon communities in Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, and Mexico and used them as buffers against its adversaries. In Suriname, "Bush Negros" fought a century-long war with the proud Dutch colonial government and in 1762 pushed it into a humiliating peace treaty—the European negotiators, following African custom, had to endorse the pact by drinking their own blood. A maroon-Indian alliance in Florida forced the U.S. government after two wars to grant liberty to its population of escaped slaves. It was the only time that Washington freed a class of slaves before the Emancipation Proclamation (to save face, the government called the pact a "capitulation"). Most important, slaves in Haiti created an entire maroon nation by driving out the French in 1804—a revolution that terrified slave owners across Europe and the Americas.

These struggles are not confined to the past. African populations in Colombia, Central America, and Mexico are increasingly climbing out of the shadows and demanding an end to discrimination. In the United States the descendants of maroons are at the center of legal battles from Florida to California. The greatest impact may be in Brazil, though, where recent laws have given maroon communities a key role in determining the future of Amazonia.

AFRICANS IN CHARGE

Back in Africa, or so the tale goes, Aqualtune was a princess and a general. It is said that she ruled one of the Imbangala states that rose in central Angola as the previously dominant Kingdom of Kongo declined. In about 1605, according to the story, she was captured in a battle against the Kongolese and sold with other POWs to Portuguese slavers. On the passage across she was raped and impregnated. Aqualtune landed in the sugar port of Recife, at the tip of Brazil's "bulge" into the Atlantic. A military strategist, she naturally began to plan an escape. Within months she was in the hinterland with about forty of her troops. Twenty-five miles from the coast, a series of abrupt basaltic extrusions dominates the plain like a line of watchtowers. Their sheer, cliff-like walls reach hundreds of feet up to flat summits with dizzying views of the surrounding plain. One of these tall hills was the Serra da Barriga—Potbelly Hill. On its peak was a pool of cool water, sheltered by trees, perhaps fifty yards across, with an indigenous community around it. Here Aqualtune founded Palmares.

Today Aqualtune's peak is a national park. A plaque by the pond proudly recounts her story—doubtless to the distress of historians, because nobody knows how much of it is true. What is known is that thirty thousand or more Africans fled to the Serra da Barriga and the nearby hills in the 1620s and 1630s, taking advantage of the disorder caused when the Dutch attacked and occupied the Portuguese coastal sugar towns during that time. Free of European control, the escapees built up as many as twenty tightly knit settlements centered on the Serra da Barriga, a haven for African, native, and European runaways. At its height in the 1650s, according to the Harvard historian John K. Thornton, the maroon state of Palmares "ruled over a vast area in the coastal mountains of Brazil, constituting a rival power unlike any other group outside Europe." It had close to as many inhabitants at the time as all of English North America. It was as if an African army had been scooped up and deposited in the Americas to control an area of more than ten thousand square miles.

Palmares's capital was Macaco, Aqualtune's springside resting place. Spread along a wide street half a mile long, it had a church, a council house, four small-scale iron foundries, and several hundred homes, the whole surrounded by irrigated fields. The head of state was Aqualtune's son, Ganga Zumba, who lived in what one European visitor described as a "palace," complete with an entourage of flattering courtiers. Other members of the royal family ruled other villages. Ganga Zumba may have been a title, rather than a name; *nganga a nzumbi* was a priestly rank in many Angolan societies. In any case, the visitor reported, he was treated with the deference due a king. His subjects had to approach him on their knees, clapping their hands in an African gesture of obeisance.

Knowing that his people were always subject to attack, Ganga Zumba organized the towns more like military camps than farming villages—strict discipline, constant guard duty, frequent drill sessions. Each major settlement was ringed by a double-walled wooden palisade with high walkways along the top and watchtowers at the corners. In turn the palisades were surrounded by protective snarls of timber, hidden deadfalls, pits lined with poisoned stakes, and fields of caltrops (antipersonnel weapons made from iron spikes welded together in such a way that one always points upward, ready to injure anyone who steps on it). Every single person who had fled slavery to live there had risked life and limb for liberty in a way that is difficult to imagine today. Palmares fairly bristled with determination to maintain command over its own destiny.

One of the most persistent myths about the slave trade is also one of the most pernicious: that Africans' role was wholly that of hapless pawns. Except

for the trade's last few decades—and arguably not even then—Africans themselves controlled the supply of African slaves, selling them to Europeans in the numbers they chose at prices they negotiated as equals. To be sure, Europeans tried to play off slavers against each other to get lower prices. But Africans played off European buyers against each other, too, captain against captain, nation against nation.

If Africans were not forced by Europeans to sell other Africans, why did they do it? In some sense, the question is an example of "presentism"—the projection of contemporary beliefs onto the past. Few Europeans or Africans at this time viewed slavery as an institution that needed to be explained, still less as an evil to be decried. Slavery was part of the furniture of everyday life; in both Europe and Africa, depriving others of their liberty wasn't morally problematic, though it was bad to enslave the wrong person. Christians, for example, were generally not supposed to enslave fellow Christians, though breaking this rule was sometimes permitted. Africans sold other Africans into slavery more often than Europeans less because of their different attitudes toward liberty than because of their different economic systems.

Broadly speaking, according to Thornton, the Harvard historian, "slaves were the only form of private, revenue-producing property recognized in African law." In western and central Europe, the most important form of property was land, and the aristocracy consisted mainly of large landowners who could buy or sell property with little legal restriction. In western and central Africa, by contrast, land was effectively owned by the government—sometimes personally by the king, sometimes by a kinship or religious group, most often by the state itself, with the sovereign exercising authority in the manner of a chief executive officer. No matter which arrangement held true in a given polity, though, the land could not be readily sold or taxed. What *could* be sold and taxed was labor. Kings and emperors who wanted to enrich themselves thus didn't think in terms of occupying land but of controlling people. Napoleon sent his army to seize Egypt. An African Napoleon would have sent his army to seize *Egyptians.*

As was the case in much of Europe, Africans could be sentenced to slavery if they forfeited their membership in society by committing a crime. People could be enslaved, too, to repay a debt, whether incurred by themselves, their families, or their lineages. In times of drought or flood they pawned family members to other members of their extended families or clans. Sometimes they pawned *themselves.* But the most common way to acquire slaves was by sending troops across the border—that is, by war. Seventeenth-century West Africa was even more politically fragmented than Europe. A map prepared by Thornton shows more than sixty different states of wildly

varying size. When leaders in one state wanted to aggrandize their status, a border was always nearby; it was easy to send out raiders. Captives would be taken by the king or given for sale to middlemen, who would take them to customers in North Africa or Europe.

In the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade, when European ships first became a constant presence on African shores, the difference between the two systems, European and African, was more a matter of culture than economics. Europeans could buy and sell labor—that was the purpose, to cite one example, of indentured-service contracts. And Africans could effectively own land by controlling the labor from the people who used that land. In both cases the owners ended up profiting from the fruits of the land and labor, even if the route to those profits was different. In economic terms, Europeans could own one of the factors of production (land), whereas Africans could own another (labor). Both systems gave owners the right to claim part or all of the products of that labor. Still, they were far from identical. One big distinction is that labor can be taken from one place to another in a way that land cannot. Labor is portable—a key factor for the later development of the slave trade.

Because labor was the main form of property in West Africa, rich West Africans almost by definition owned a lot of slaves. Plantations were rare in that part of the world—coastal West Africa's soil and climate typically won't support them—so big groups of slaves rarely were found working in fields as was common in American sugar or tobacco plantations. Instead slaves were soldiers, servants, or construction workers, building roads and fences and barns. Often enough they did almost nothing; wealthy, powerful slave owners kept more slaves than they needed, in the way that wealthy, powerful landowners in Europe would pile up unused land. In addition, much slave labor consisted of occasional work performed as a tax or tribute.

Foreign observers noticed that the surplus and tribute slaves didn't always have to work hard or for long periods of time, and they often concluded that African slavery was inherently less brutal than slavery in the Americas. In terms of long-term survival, this seems to have been true. On a tobacco plantation in the Americas, slaves who couldn't work had no value, and were treated that way. The same slaves would have some value in Africa—they were adornments to the owner, in somewhat the same manner that diamond necklaces are valuable despite their lack of practical use. Even the oldest, most infirm slaves could wear fine clothes and walk in a procession, chanting praises of their masters. Or they could simply be interesting to their owners. For several years the king of Dahomey had an utterly useless palace slave who had been seized as a debt repayment: a hapless Briton named Bulfinch

Lamb, whom the monarch enjoyed talking to. Moreover, African slaves were more likely to be granted liberty after a period of service than they were in the Americas, both because captives often had a kin connection to their captors and because as subjects they were still valuable to the monarch (freed slaves were a total loss to plantation owners if they were still capable of work). The two factors mitigated the callousness of the institution, helping to satisfy Adam Smith's economic objections to slavery. Still, one suspects the Africans wrested from their homes in military raids would not have celebrated the humanity of the system.

When Europeans arrived, they easily tapped into the existing slave trade. African governments and merchants who were already shipping human beings could increase production to satisfy the foreigners' demands. Sometimes political leaders would hike criminal penalties to obtain slaves. Scofflaws, tax cheats, political exiles, unwanted immigrants—all went in the hopper. Usually, though, armies were sent to raid other nations. Or soldiers could abduct an important person in a neighboring polity and demand a ransom of slaves. If demand increased still further, private traders might seize captives without approval, angering the state. If no other source was available, Africans bought slaves from Europeans. In the seventeenth century, the Yale historian Robert Harms has estimated, Europeans sold forty to eighty thousand slaves to Africans in what is now Ghana.

African demand was as important as European demand in the growth of the trade. When the flintlock replaced the undependable matchlock at the end of the seventeenth century, Africans were as keen to acquire the new guns as the Indians in Georgia and Carolina. In April 1732, traders from the rapidly growing Asante empire appeared at the Dutch fort of Elmina, in Ghana. They had a convoy of captives which they demanded to exchange for guns. Frightened by the threatening tone of the conversation, Harms wrote, Elmina's "governor-general sent a desperate circular to all the other forts ordering that all flintlocks be sent to Elmina at once." Asante had become the dominant regional power by a calculated exchange of slaves for guns and gunpowder. The waves of slavery that fueled Asante's arms buildup, Harms remarked, "account for much of the rise in Dutch slave exports in the 1720s."

African merchants bought slaves from African armies, raiders, and pirates and paid Africans to convey them to African-run holding tanks. Once the contract was arranged, Africans loaded the slaves aboard the ships, which often had crews with significant numbers of Africans. Other Africans supplied the slave ships with food, rope, water, and timber for the voyage out. Europeans naturally played a role: they were customers, the demand side of the basic economic equation. A few even braved the African coast, marrying

Africans; their children frequently became negotiators and middlemen in the African slave trade. A combination of disease and watchful African armies otherwise kept them confined to outposts on the edge of the continent.*

Tiny outposts, for the most part. The Dutch West Indies Company long held a legal monopoly on the Dutch slave trade, shipping out about 220,000 captives by 1800. Elmina, its African headquarters, had a European population that rarely exceeded four hundred, and was usually smaller. Three miles away was Cape Coast, the biggest base of the English Royal African Company, which had an equivalent legal monopoly on the English slave trade. From its docks left tens of thousands of enchained men, women, and children. Yet Cape Coast had fewer than a hundred foreign inhabitants. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European maps proudly depicted African's Atlantic coast as bristling with Danish, Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish forts, garrisons, and trading posts. But most of the stars on the maps had fewer than ten expatriate residents and many had fewer than five. The principality of Whydah, in today's Benin, exported 400,000 people in the first quarter of the eighteenth century—it was the most important depot in the Atlantic slave trade in that time. Not one hundred Europeans lived there permanently. The largest groups of foreigners were the slavers who camped on the beach as they waited to fill their ships with human cargo.

Yet these minute stations were the catalytic points for an enormous change. In the past, most African slaveholders had known something about their slaves' previous lives. Sometimes they were related to their bondsmen, distant cousins or in-laws; other times they understood exactly what familial, lineage, or tribal obligation had resulted in their enslavement. Even prisoners of war had been obtained in a known location, in a known conflict. Chattel slavery on colonial plantations, by contrast, made slaves anonymous—they were, so to speak, something bought in a store, selected purely on physical characteristics, like so many cans of soup. (In account books, slavers called their human cargo "pieces," a revealing term.) European slaveholders usually didn't even see their human property; they were thousands of miles away, safe from disease in London, Paris, and Lisbon. When they wanted to expand production of sugar or tobacco, they borrowed money from equally distant financiers and dispatched written instructions to acquire so many pieces at such-and-such a price. This transformation was not understood as it

* Huge numbers have watched the opening hour of the miniseries *Roots*, in which U.S. slavers raid villages in the Gambia. In fact, such forays were rare. African states didn't like trespassers, especially when the trespassers were slaving companies trying to cut them out of the supply chain—and the captives were their own subjects.

occurred. But it removed a bond, however tenuous, between slave and owner. No longer were captives an owner's relatives or vanquished enemies. Instead they were anonymous units of labor, production inputs on a balance sheet, to be disposed of purely according to an estimate of their future economic value.

Hovering in their vessels along the coast, Dutch, Portuguese, and English slavers thus had little knowledge about the origins of the unhappy men and women on their ships. The colonists who rushed to buy their cargo on the quays of Jamestown, Cartagena, and Salvador had even less. According to Thornton, "only a handful of American slave owners seem to have actually known . . . that many thousands of them were prisoners of war." When captive soldiers organized escapes and rebellions, some owners learned the import of their military backgrounds. From the beginning, American slave owners were dogged by the problem that their army of slaves could be an enslaved army.

The first bondsmen in Hispaniola came mainly from the civil war–torn Jolof empire in what is now Senegal and Gambia. It seems likely that many of the slaves sent to the Caribbean were POWs—military men. In any case Spanish records note that the first large-scale slave revolt in the Americas was led by Jolofs. It occurred on Christmas Day, 1521, at a sugar mill owned by Diego Colón, son and heir of the admiral. About forty slaves raided a cattle ranch, killed several celebrating Spaniards, burned down a few buildings, and took numerous prisoners, including a dozen Indian slaves. Colón assembled a cavalry force that charged the renegades. The classic response for foot soldiers facing horses is to bunch together tightly, spears facing out from a defensive wall—the tactic used by Greek infantry to win the battles of Marathon and Plataea. Despite their lack of weapons, the slaves did exactly that, their line holding together until the third charge. Eventually the renegade captains fell. Survivors were hunted down and hanged along the road to deter other would-be troublemakers.

The Spaniards' troubles were not over. Even as the bodies dangled along the highway, a Taino leader called Enriquillo was setting up a European-free village in the southwestern mountains. Enriquillo, a devout Christian who had been taught by Franciscan monks, was initially co-opted by the *encomienda* system. Exactly as its designers had hoped, he sent out his people to work in exchange for status and trade goods. But Enriquillo's trustee—his *encomendero*—didn't like having to negotiate with him for workers. In a fit of anger the *encomendero* assaulted Enriquillo's wife and stole his horse. The Taino man furiously confronted him. As the Indian advocate Bartolomé de las Casas tells the story, the *encomendero* reacted to Enriquillo's protests by

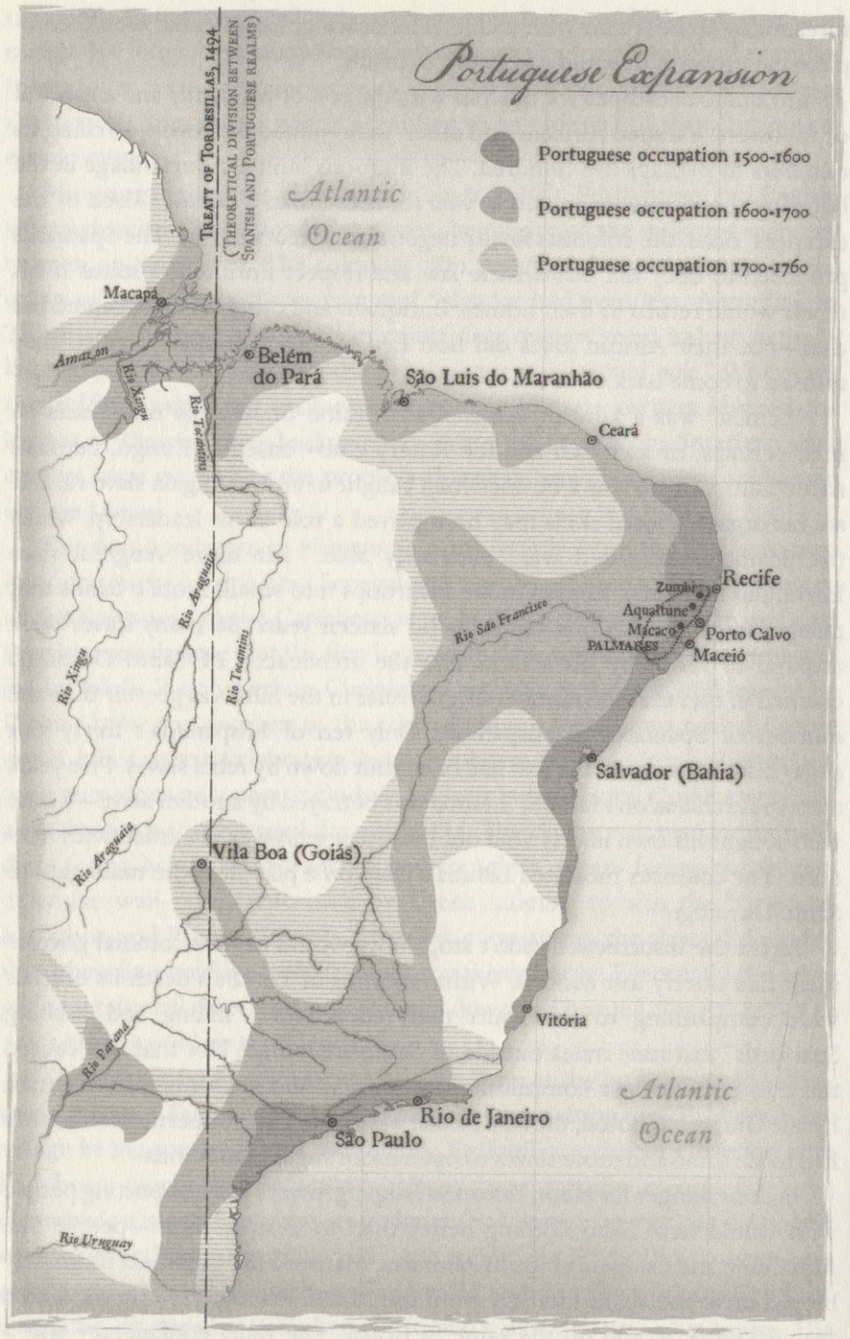
threatening to beat him with a club. The beating, he mocked, would complete the proverb: it would add injury to insult.

Enriquillo decamped for the hills with the rest of his family and a handful of followers. Escaped Africans and other Taino joined the revolt, swelling its numbers to perhaps five hundred. The maroons built a covert village in the hills that the Spaniards hunted in vain for more than a decade. Tired of the escapees' raids, the colonists finally negotiated a treaty in 1533. The Spaniards promised to obey the *encomendero* law and respect Enriquillo's status if his rebels would return to their homes. Enriquillo and other Taino accepted the deal—but their African allies did not. Led by one Sebastian Lemba, they refused to come back.

"Lemba" was a kind of spiritual association of wealthy merchants—a mix, perhaps, of a church and the Rotary club—based in Kongo. Lemba's name hints that he was a businessman caught in an Imbangala slave raid. If so, his organizational skills may have played a role in his leadership, which the Spaniards admitted was "extremely able." Far more vengeful than Enriquillo had been, Lemba broke his troops into small, mobile bands that pillaged sugar plantations and mills for sixteen years. So many slaves were inspired to revolt by his actions that the archdeacon of Santo Domingo claimed in 1542 that the number of guerrillas in the hills was greater than the number of Spaniards in Hispaniola. Only ten of Hispaniola's thirty-four sugar mills were open; the rest had been shut down by rebel slaves. Five years after the archdeacon's lament, Lemba was betrayed by another slave—a man who sought his own liberty sold out by a man who was rewarded with freedom. The colonists mounted Lemba's head on a pike near the main gate to Santo Domingo.

Again the insurrection didn't stop. Why would it? The colonial government had utterly lost control. Within months of Lemba's death its officials were complaining to the court that rebels were "killing and robbing Spaniards" just nine miles outside of Santo Domingo. Not that this caused them to rethink their commitment to slavery. As the Dominican historian Lynne Guitar has noted, the same letter asked the king for permission to ship five to six thousand more slaves to open more sugar plantations.

In their hunger for labor, European sugar growers were importing people who would have liked nothing better than to destroy them—people like Aqualtune and Ganga Zumba in Palmares. Maroons in Hispaniola ultimately helped drive the sugar industry from the island. Portuguese officials feared that Palmares would do the same in Brazil. The rebel confederacy was a direct military and political challenge to the colonial enterprise. Not only did its troops raid Portuguese settlements, its strategic location atop hills like the



Serra da Barriga blocked further European expansion into that part of the interior. If such rebellions spread to other ports of Brazil, Lisbon feared that its colonists would become a kind of marine froth on the coast, while the interior turned into a mosaic of Afro-Indian states.

Palmares was led by Angolans, but it was not an Angolan society, or even an African society. Many of its people were Tupi-speaking Indians. Some were Europeans with uneasy relations to their own societies; Jews and converted Jews, heretics and ex-heretics, suspected witches and escaped criminals, and a salting of suspicious ethnic minorities. In the main Palmares's people looked like Africans, but they lived in Indian homes made from woven thatch and steam-bent arches and harvested Indian-style multicrop fields of maize (American), rice (African), and manioc (American). (African rice, *Oryza glaberrima,* was domesticated in West Africa and is a different species than Asian rice, *Oryza sativa.*) Palmares's blacksmiths used African-style forges to make plows, scythes, spears, and swords; colonial reports claimed they could even make guns and bullets. Their religious ceremonies, from what one can gather today, mixed Christianity with Indian and African elements. But their military organization was African, with Aqualtune's children and grandchildren in strict control of villages so battle-hardened that they should perhaps be thought of as bases.

Between 1643 and 1677 Portugal and the Netherlands (which occupied part of Brazil for some of this time) attacked Palmares more than twenty times, always unsuccessfully. When the armies approached the maroon state's outlying settlements, their inhabitants would flee to the hilltops, where fertile soils, artesian water, and storehouses of food made it possible to outlast any siege. The attackers would find empty villages stripped of food and valuables. Then they would blunder about the forest, trying to find the people. Soon they would run out of supplies. All the while they would be watched—and ambushed. Arrows flew from the trees to pick off stragglers. Advance scouts fell into hidden pits. Men woke up to find their comrades missing and their food stolen. Infuriating to the soldiers, the region's planters bought their slaves' food from Palmares. In exchange for maize and manioc, the planters had provided the maroons with the guns and knives now trained on the soldiers.

A central figure in the story of Palmares was Zumbi, who became its military commander. The nephew of Ganga Zumba, the king, Zumbi was taken as an infant by Dutch forces during an otherwise unsuccessful attack. He was raised under a European name by a priest in the small coastal town of Porto Calvo, learning Portuguese, Latin, theology, and sciences like navigation and metallurgy. In 1670 the teenaged Zumbi ran back to Palmares and resumed

his maroon name and life, though he returned to the priest for sentimental visits. Charismatic, well educated, and knowledgeable about the enemy, he rose quickly to command despite a severe limp from a wound suffered in an early battle. Zumbi, too, may have been a title, rather than a name. It means something like "ancestral spirit"—a reference, perhaps, to his return from the death of colonial life.

A Portuguese assault in 1677 wounded Ganga Zumba and captured some of his children and grandchildren. Weary and saddened, the king negotiated a peace treaty the next year with the Portuguese. He promised to stop accepting new escapees and move out of the mountains if the Portuguese would stop attacking Palmares. Zumbi viewed the pact as a sellout of everything the maroons stood for. Angered beyond measure, he poisoned the king, seized the throne, and tore up the treaty. The war was on again. Colonial militias attacked every year for the next six years, achieving little.

Appalled by the meager results of the forty-year campaign against Palmares, the newly appointed governor-general of the region decided to try a different tack. He had received a request from a man named Domingos Jorge Velho for a license to conquer more Indians. Reluctantly, the governor agreed to meet him.

Jorge Velho was a *bandeirante,* a backwoodsman. Often the product of a union between a Portuguese man and an Indian woman, *bandeirantes* used their mothers' connections to advance the agenda of their fathers—indeed, the term *bandeirante* means "flag-bearer," and refers to their role in claiming land for Portugal. Jorge Velho was an exemplary case. A Kiplingesque adventurer, he had assembled a private army and created a kind of private kingdom in southern Amazonia. Hundreds of Indians served him as fieldworkers and soldiers, controlled partly by his promise to protect them from other, worse *bandeirantes.* Jorge Velho had the gangster's predilection for boasting of his magnanimity. He seized Indians and their land, he later proclaimed in a letter to the Portuguese court, for the natives' own good, not merely for profit. By taking natives from the forest, he

> domesticate[d] them to the knowledge of civilized life and human society and to association and rational dealings. . . . If afterward we use them in our fields we do them no injustice, for this is to support them and their children as much as to support us and ours.

The letter's flowery phrases, as well as the letter itself, were doubtless written for him by someone else; Jorge Velho was illiterate.

As the governor discovered at the meeting, the *bandeirante* had more in common with the maroons than with other Europeans. He spoke Portuguese so badly that he had to use an interpreter to speak with colonial officials. "This man is one of the worst savages I have ever encountered," reported the appalled bishop of Pernambuco, who reserved especial ire for the *bandeirante*'s penchant for traveling with seven Indian concubines "to exercise his lusts." (The concubines, more than sexual partners, were Jorge Velho's links into native communities. For the same reason, he also had a Portuguese wife.)

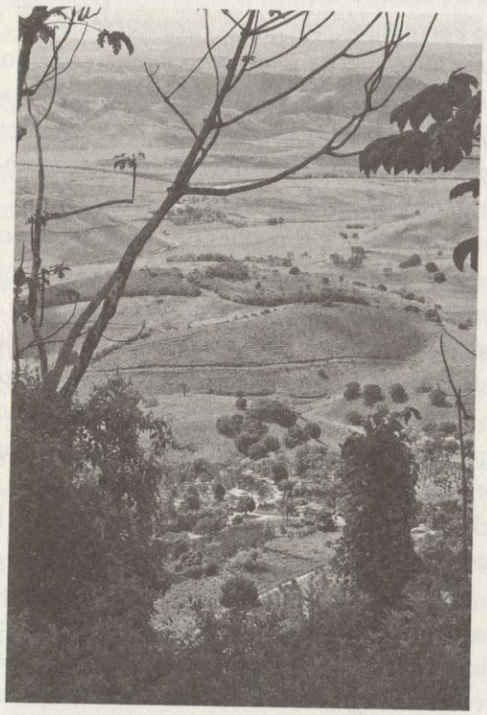
The colonial administration knew that Jorge Velho might be able to break Zumbi, but its officials were reluctant in the extreme to hire him. Only after almost seven years of dithering did the authorities finally cave in. By that time Jorge Velho had them over a barrel—he was their last chance. If he would move on taking care of the Palmares problem, the governor-general promised, the administration would provide his men with gunpowder, bullets, food, a tax-free hand with any booty, a reward for every captured African, and, perhaps most important, full pardons for any previous crimes.

Accompanied by about a thousand native troops and almost a hundred Portuguese, Indo-Portuguese, and Afro-Portuguese, Jorge Velho marched out from his estate in 1692. The journey to Palmares, almost five hundred miles long, occurred in what he modestly described as "the worst conditions of toil, hunger, thirst and destitution that have yet been known and perhaps ever will be known." Two hundred of his troops died; another two hundred deserted. They ran out of food and ammunition and had to wait for ten starving months in the forest for supplies promised by the colonial authorities in Recife. Reduced to "six hundred native soldiers and forty-five whites," Jorge Velho's force returned to the assault in December 1693.

Zumbi's headquarters in Macaco was next to impossible to approach. I got a hint of what it had been like when I visited the park atop Serra da Barriga. Ruts in the muddy, unmarked route tore out the exhaust in the rental car; local teenagers kindly tied it back on with wire scavenged from a telephone pole. From the summit, everything for miles around was visible, cars and tractors picked out by the sun with dizzying clarity. I could imagine maroons watching Jorge Velho's men below like a line of ants on a tablecloth. Attackers and defenders both were mainly Indians and Africans with a sprinkling of Europeans. The difference was that in Palmares the Europeans were not running the show. Scrambling up the hill to Macaco, the *bandeirantes* had to twist through a maze of defenses, caltrops slicing at their feet and hands, maroon troops shooting at them from the palisade towers. The attackers formed a ring around the peak in an attempt to starve out the town. It was like a medieval siege in the tropical forest.

After several weeks of stalemate, the besiegers apparently realized that the maroons had more supplies than they did. Jorge Velho instructed his forces to construct a series of stout, movable barricades. Crouching behind them, his men shoved and wedged the walls up the hill a few feet at a time, scanning the coming ground for caltrops, snares, drop-traps, and poisoned stakes, heedless of the arrows and bullets thunking into the other side of the wood. Although the *bandeirantes* had timed their assault for the dry season, rain fell for days on end, turning every inch of ground into thick mud. Realizing that the movable barricades were blocking their shots, maroon archers and gunmen slipped out of the palisade and climbed high into trees. When the attackers' walls moved beneath them, they shot the *bandeirantes* in the back.

Zumbi paced the walkways atop the palisades, rallying his wet, exhausted forces. On the moonless night of February 5, 1694, he discovered that *bandeirantes* had killed two sentries. (The story comes from maroon testimony afterward.) In the darkness and rain the rest of the guard had not noticed the



From the summit of Serra da Barriga, the maroons of Palmares could see every movement below.

gap in the defenses—or that the attackers closest to it had taken advantage of that inattention to bring their barricades within a few feet of the walls. Squinting through the downpour at the barely visible attackers, Zumbi apparently realized that it now would be impossible to stop the assault from breaching the palisade. News of the imminent attack radiated through Macaco like terror itself. As Zumbi tried to rally his force for a final defense, some of his men realized that the attackers, too, had a gap in their line. They tore down part of the palisade and fled through it. The *bandeirantes,* caught by surprise, let most of the maroons pass, firing only a single volley at their heels. Then they poured into Macaco through the fallen wall.

Neither side had expected the final assault to occur when and where it did. In the darkness and confusion and rain, Indians, Africans, and Europeans on both sides smashed clumsily at each other with sticks and blades. Guns were useless in an hour when fighters could barely see and weapons slipped from muddy hands. Covered in a thick impasto of blood and earth, shouting and sobbing, the two forces assailed each other without compunction. Half the six hundred *bandeirantes* died within minutes, as did an equal number of maroons. Perhaps two hundred more maroons were forced off the cliff or threw themselves off rather than face captivity—no one is sure. When dawn at last shone on the sodden Serra da Barriga, Macaco was in ruins.

Somehow Zumbi escaped. The surviving *bandeirantes* thought at first that he had flung himself off the cliff. Instead he continued to skirmish with the Portuguese for more than a year, until one of his aides revealed his location. Zumbi and a small band of followers were ambushed and killed on November 20, 1695. His body was taken to Porto Calvo and identified by people who had known him as a child. All along the coast colonists celebrated the victory, parading through the streets with torches night after night in an improvised festival of joy. Zumbi's decapitated head was taken to Recife, where it was displayed on a spike to forestall any claims that he had somehow survived. Ninety years after Aqualtune arrived in the Americas, her city had at last been destroyed. But it was anything but the end of *quilombos* and maroons in Brazil or anywhere else in the Americas.

IN THE ISTHMUS

Vasco Núñez de Balboa, like Cortés and Pizarro, was from the remote Spanish region of Extremadura. Like them, he was a bold, ruthless, antically ambitious man. Economical with the truth and recklessly impulsive, he was, according to an acquaintance, "tall and well-built, with good, strong limbs

and the refined gestures of an educated man." As the younger son of a down-at-heels noble family, he had prospects bleak enough to encourage him to ship across the ocean in 1500, when he was about twenty-five. He established himself as a farmer in Salvatierra de la Sabana, a remote hamlet in southwestern Hispaniola.

In retrospect, it was a terrible career choice. "The calm and tranquil life of the farmer wasn't a match for his great aspirations and adventurous, energetic spirit," explained one admiring Spanish biographer. Indeed, Núñez de Balboa's great aspirations and adventurous, energetic spirit led him to pile up debts at such a clip that he fled his creditors by stuffing himself into a barrel and having himself rolled aboard a ship bound with supplies for a new colony on the mainland, Spain's first attempt to establish a base there. (According to some reports, he stowed away in the barrel *with his dog*.)

The settlement, located in what is now Colombia, near the border with Panama, had been established to find gold mines. Labor was to be provided by enslaving local Indians, some of whom would also be sold in Hispaniola. The Indians saw no reason to participate in this scheme and expressed their lack of enthusiasm by riddling the invaders with poisoned arrows. With the colony near collapse, its founder sailed for help in Hispaniola in July 1510. His ship ran aground off the coast of Cuba and he staggered half-starved across the island. After being rescued, he immediately retired from the discovery-and-conquest business. Meanwhile, another ship had left from Santo Domingo in September to aid the settlement. This was the vessel that contained Núñez de Balboa and his barrel.

He was quickly discovered. Charismatic and clever, he managed to talk the irate captain out of stranding him on a desert island. Within weeks Núñez de Balboa was one of the captain's most valued lieutenants. Within months he had persuaded the captain to relocate the colony to what he thought would be a better location. Within a year he had deposed the captain and was leading an expedition up the coast of Panama, looking for gold.

In Panama, Núñez de Balboa became the first European to see the Pacific Ocean from the American side, an exploit that won him enduring fame. Today, five centuries later, a cursory online search for "Núñez de Balboa" will find countless pictures of the conquistador standing athwart a crag or striding into the waves, sometimes in full armor, gazing in wonder at the endless sea ahead. But the heroic images have not kept up with his reputation among historians. Núñez de Balboa was unquestionably bold and brave, but he also committed actions that are difficult to justify in any current ethical scheme. And he may well not have been the first person from the other side of the Atlantic to see the Pacific from the American side.

The newly moved colony, Santa María la Antigua del Darién (Antigua), was legally under the jurisdiction of another conquistador. When this conquistador came to Antigua to demand control, Núñez de Balboa put him onto a leaky brigantine and told him to sail away. He was never seen again. Now feeling more secure about his command, Núñez de Balboa turned his attention to the resident Kuna and Choco peoples, whose penchant for draping themselves with gold jewelry made them fascinating in Spanish eyes. He began asking around for the source of the gold.

About fifty miles north of Antigua reigned a man named Comagre, who lived with his many wives and children in what the historian Pietro Martire d'Anghiera described as "a house made of big, interwoven timbers, with a hall 80 paces wide and 150 long and what looked like a coffered ceiling." His domain—the Spaniards called it a "seigneury"—had about ten thousand inhabitants. When Núñez de Balboa paid a visit, Comagre plied the expedition with "wine made from grain and fruit," assigned the visitors seventy slaves for the duration of their visit, and gave them "four thousand ounces of gold in jewelry and finely worked pieces." The Spaniards whipped out scales and weighed out shares of the booty amid much quarreling. Laughing at their cartoonish greed, Comagre's son told them of the existence of another seigneury with even more gold, on the shores of "another sea which has never been sailed by your little boats."

Another sea! More gold! Núñez de Balboa was beside himself with excitement. He returned to Antigua, put together an expedition of about eight hundred—two hundred Spaniards and six hundred Indians—and set off on September 1, 1513. (Along for the ride were at least one mixed-race man and an African, both probably bondsmen; the African would later be given his freedom, land in Nicaragua, and 150 Indian slaves.) The journey began in the steep, wet, thickly forested hills of eastern Panama, which rise up almost directly from the coast. It was the height of the rainy season—annual precipitation there is as much as sixteen feet. Staggering under the weight of armor, plagued by insects and snakes, covered in mud, the Spaniards soon began falling to illness and injury. Núñez de Balboa led his increasingly ragged force from one native group to the next, asking questions and seeking food, leaving his weak and sick behind at every stop. The coastal ridges descend vertiginously into the hot, mucky valley of the Chucunaque River, so close to the Pacific that tides cause daily floods far upstream. From the river's other bank ascend a jumble of craggy low peaks atoss with palms. The exhausted men reached these slopes on September 24, having traveled about forty miles in three weeks.

Near the summit they encountered Quarequa, lord of a small seigneury

of the same name. Backed by hundreds of men with bows and spears, he refused to let the foreigners enter his land. The Indians, who had never seen firearms and swords, confronted the Spaniards in a mass. Without warning, Núñez de Balboa ordered his men to fire at point-blank range. Into the smoke the Spaniards ran with naked swords. Hundreds died, including Quarequa, the bodies piled atop one another. The Spaniards chased the survivors into their main village, where they found all the gold and food stores gone. The next day, September 25, Núñez de Balboa and his tattered band climbed to the summit and saw the dizzying vastness of the Pacific before them. In a gesture that now seems touchingly absurd, he claimed all of the ocean and attendant lands it touched for Spain.*

Left behind in Quarequa's village were women, children, and some African slaves—"black men with big bodies and big bellies, and long beards and crooked hair," as one report described them a year and a half later. The Spaniards had been stunned to see them, and stunned again when they were told that an entire community of escaped African slaves existed just two days' walk away. Indians and Africans had been fighting for years, each side forcing captives from the other into slavery.

The Spaniards' identification of the slaves as Africans is unlikely to be mistaken—they were traveling with at least two. Nor does the story seem to be apocryphal; half a dozen Spanish sources attest to it. Not one of these sources, however, drew out the implications. First, the existence of slaves in the mountains likely meant that Africans, not Europeans, were the first people from across the Atlantic to settle on the mainland—and to see the Pacific from the American side. Second, it meant that the isthmus was a good place for escaped slaves to evade capture. The latter fact would come to preoccupy the Spanish crown.

Finding a route to the Pacific electrified the Spaniards in Antigua. They soon abandoned the colony, which became a ghost town.† Most of its former

* Less touching from today's perspective were Núñez de Balboa's actions in Quarequa's village. In it he had found forty members of Quarequa's family and court dressed as women. The story is that he had them torn apart by dogs (one of whom, supposedly, was the dog in his barrel). Other villagers then pointed out more transvestites and persuaded him to kill them, too. The sequence of events is hard to credit as presented. Although Panamanian native groups were reputedly tolerant of homosexuals, their presence in big, cohesive groups is unlikely. One can speculate that the Spaniards mistook some form of courtly attire for women's clothing. In the political vacuum caused by Quarequa's death, the courtiers' enemies may have used this misapprehension to get the Spaniards to eliminate rivals.

† Santa María la Antigua del Darién is often said to be the first permanent European settlement on the mainland. "Permanent" is a stretch; the colonists abandoned it after 9 years. About 170 years later, Scotland tried to establish a colony just a few miles away, with results that I described in Chapter 3.

inhabitants went on to found two new settlements: Panamá, on the Pacific side of the isthmus, and Nombre de Dios, on the Atlantic. The idea was that spices from the Maluku Islands, which Spain intended to capture, would be transported to the Americas, carried on a new road between the two towns, then loaded onto ships for Europe. When Spain failed to seize the Malukus, both would-be ports shrank.

Neither Panamá nor Nombre de Dios had more than forty European residents in 1533, when the unexpected news arrived that Francisco Pizarro, one of Núñez de Balboa's companions on his journey across the isthmus, had conquered a great Indian empire in the Andes, and was sending gold and silver to Panamá. (Núñez de Balboa did not participate in the subjugation of the Inka. His flagrant machinations had caught up with him, and he had been executed in 1519.) Twelve years later, in 1545, silver was discovered at Potosí. Half or more of the silver—including most of the king's taxes and fees from the mines and mint—was shipped to Panamá.

The road between Panamá and Nombre de Dios thus became a critical chokepoint for the empire, a single passage down which flowed much of the monarchy's financial lifeblood. From an engineering point of view, it was not ideal. Knee-deep in mud and choked by debris, barely wide enough for two mules to pass, the road plunged in a tangle of switchbacks between crag and swamp and back again. Traversing it terrified the Spaniards—the forest, one chronicler complained, swarmed with "lions, tigers, bears, and jaguars." Screaming monkeys threw rocks from trees. Fer-de-lances and bushmasters, two of the planet's most deadly snakes, were active at night. Travelers could paint themselves from head to foot with oil and mud to ward off mosquitoes but were helpless against the bats—"biting so delicately on the tips of [sleepers'] toes, and the hands, and the end of the nose, and the ears," an Italian moaned, "that one is never the wiser, and gnawing that little mouthful of meat, and sucking the blood that comes from it." They couldn't be warded off, he said, because the heat made it necessary "to sleep naked atop the covers." Even in the dry season it was sweaty going for men in European armor, a necessary precaution against Indian attack. During the rainy season, the road was flat-out impassable; travelers had to pole barges up or down the Chagres River, navigable when swelled by rain but dangerous for the same reason. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe simply did not have the means and technology to maintain an adequate highway in these conditions. It remained "an extremely bad road, the worst that I have seen on my travels," one annoyed voyager wrote in 1640, 120 years after its initial construction.

To convey the king's silver across the isthmus required many hands. As

ever, labor was in short supply. Few Spaniards would leave their homes to toil in a remote forest. To would-be silver transporters, there was an obvious recourse: Indian slaves. At the time that Núñez de Balboa saw the Pacific, the isthmus of Panama was filled by perhaps a hundred small, fractious polities, honeycombed so tightly together that the sixteenth-century historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés claimed the native population "surpassed two million, or they were uncountable." Modern estimates are much lower: because most seigneuries (as I am calling them) had no more than three thousand people, researchers say, the total population must have been at most a quarter of a million. The exact figure almost doesn't matter, though, because the isthmus was rapidly depopulated. By the time Potosí began exporting silver, historians estimate that fewer than twenty thousand people lived there. Even if the remaining Indians had allowed themselves to be captured, there simply weren't enough hands to satisfy European demand. In consequence, the empire imported slaves from the Andes, Venezuela, and Nicaragua—so many that in Spanish areas they quickly became more numerous than locals.

After Spain banned Indian slavery, the colonists turned to Africa—beginning with Núñez de Balboa, who before his death took thirty African captives to the Pacific to build ships. Soon Africans were pushing barges on the Chagres River, eighteen or twenty straining men on each one, twenty or more vessels in a row. Mule trains, scores of animals tied nose-to-tail, were crossing between the oceans, driven by dozens of whip-toting Africans, themselves driven by gun-toting Spaniards. Sometimes the journey took as long as a month. The path, the bat-hating Italian said, was lined with the corpses of mules and men.

Africans outnumbered Europeans seven to one by 1565. Unsurprisingly, Europeans found it hard to control their human property. Runaways grouped hundreds strong into multiethnic villages that were joined by escaped Indian slaves from the Andes and Venezuela and the remnants of free Indian groups from the isthmus. United by their loathing of Spaniards, they liberated slaves, slew colonists, and stole mules and cattle. Sometimes they abducted women. Losses mounted. Spain had a dreadful maroon problem.

The issue was noticed as early as 1521, but the first serious effort to eliminate a maroon settlement in the isthmus didn't occur for another thirty years, after a young slave known as Felipillo, a pearl harvester in the islands outside Panamá, led a group of fugitive Africans and Indians into the mangrove thickets of the Gulf of San Miguel. Their entire village was wiped out in 1551, after two years of freedom. Other maroons learned a lesson from Felipillo's fate: don't hide out in the lowlands, which were too accessible.

That same year, the municipal government of Nombre de Dios complained to the crown that 600 maroons were robbing and killing travelers on the road to Panamá. Two years later the havoc was worse and the number had risen to 800. Two years after that it was 1,200. In the isthmus, not only slaves but escaped slaves outnumbered Europeans. Maroons wiped out the first two Spanish expeditions against them, in 1554 and 1555. In Nombre de Dios, they stole so many captive Africans and Indians that surviving colonists feared to send their slaves outside to fetch water. Most residents fled to Panamá, returning to Nombre de Dios only when the silver fleet came into view.

Leading the maroons was a man whose name has come down to us as, variously, Bayano, Bayamo, Vallano, Vayamo, and Ballano. Like Aqualtune, he seems to have been a captured military leader. "Burly and fierce, coarse and stalwart, rudely dressed and roughly witty," the poet Juan de Miramontes described him, Bayano was "agile, bold, sudden, and sharp"—a man with a "warrior spirit." He oversaw the construction of a palisaded fortress atop a cliff-ringed hill in the ridges overlooking the Caribbean. Guards stood ready to roll stones down into the marshy ravines that were its only entrances. Located far enough from Nombre de Dios that Spaniards would be unlikely to discover it, the stronghold was mainly populated by young men whom Bayano ordered about with soldierly dispatch. Farther away was a second village for the community's women, children, and elderly. Mixing Indians from Peru to Nicaragua and a dozen African ethnicities, Bayano's mini-kingdom was an extraordinary cultural potpourri, one sixteenth-century priest remarked, with "every different mixture of people, all dissimilar in color to their fathers and mothers." Their religion, too, was an equally various jumble of Christian, Islamic, and indigenous traditions, according to Jean-Pierre Tardieu, a historian at the University of La Réunion whose work I am relying upon here. Nobody knows what language they spoke together.

A new viceroy of Peru traveled to Nombre de Dios in 1556 en route to Lima. Infuriated by Bayano's depradations, he established a fund to hire an anti-maroon force. Nobody accepted the offer. Finally the viceroy filled the roster by visiting the prison in Nombre de Dios and telling the inmates that they could either wage war against the ex-slaves or effectively become slaves themselves and be sent to the galleys. The response was positive. Seventy armed ex-convicts went out in October 1556, led by Pedro de Ursúa, an experienced soldier whom the viceroy had persuaded to take on Bayano.

Guided by a captured maroon who had become an informer, Ursúa's troops hiked through the forest for twenty-five days to reach Bayano's hilltop. Realizing that he could not successfully lay siege to the place, Ursúa instead persuaded the maroon leader to negotiate. He offered to split the isthmus

into two kingdoms, one ruled by Felipe II of Spain, one ruled by Bayano I of Panamá. Bayano accepted the flattering offer and the Spaniards hung around for weeks, hunting and fishing with the former slaves and amusing themselves with contests of strength and skill. Just before leaving, Ursúa threw a celebratory feast. Bayano and forty of his court attended. The Spaniards drugged their wine, incapacitating them. The maroons were hauled back to Nombre de Dios and returned to slavery. Ursúa took Bayano in chains to Lima as a trophy for the viceroy. Other maroons learned a lesson from Bayano's fate: Spaniards cannot be trusted.

The maroon problem did not go away. Not only did the remnants of Bayano's community regroup, but others sprang up in its wake. Eradicating them, the colonists realized, would require a long-term military campaign with as many as a thousand soldiers, most of whom would have to be sent from Europe. To obtain a thousand soldiers, the government would have to import as many as two thousand, because new European arrivals (one part of the Columbian Exchange) fell at horrific rates to malaria and yellow fever (another part of the Columbian Exchange). Nombre de Dios in particular became so unhealthy that European visitors gave it a bleakly rhyming nickname: "Nombre de Dios, Sepultura de Vivos"—Buried Alive. The king, appalled at the dying, ordered the populace moved entire to a new location, Portobelo, in 1584. It was scarcely less deadly. Visiting the new city in 1625, the English priest Thomas Gage noted that the silver fleet, once landed in Portobelo, "made great haste to be gone"; nonetheless, the ships' two-week stay in the "open grave" of Portobelo was enough to kill "about five hundred of the soldiers, merchants, and mariners." Such losses would ensure that importing an anti-maroon force from Europe would be hugely expensive.

Nobody could agree on who should pay for it. Europeans in the isthmus were mainly agents for Seville merchants. Unlike the Portuguese sugar growers who fought Palmares, few of the Spaniards in Nombre de Dios and Panamá town intended to create permanent establishments; instead the goal was to make a quick killing and leave. Naturally enough, these people did not want to spend much of their potential profit on a project—expunging maroons—that would accrue most of its benefits after their departure. Instead they asked Madrid to ship in and maintain the soldiers. As the king stood to lose most from the attacks, the merchants reasoned, he stood to gain most from their suppression, and therefore he should foot the bills. The crown, for its part, was too far away to monitor expenditures closely. With no way to ensure that the isthmus's short-termers wouldn't pocket funds designated for the anti-maroon campaign, the king was reluctant to, so to speak, sign the check. The conflict was a version of what economists call "principal agent" problem: when one party pays another to act on its behalf but can't readily measure its performance. And it was enough to stall large-scale action against the maroons, even though the stakes for Spain kept rising.

From the colonists' point of view, it was bad enough when nude, grease-smeared ex-slaves and Indians swept into Panamá town with their "very big and strong bows" and iron-tipped arrows, as one colonial official wrote in 1575, stealing cattle, carrying off slaves, and "usually killing the [Europeans] they meet." Worse, the maroons, out of spite, threw whole shipments of silver and gold into the river. But then the maroons joined forces with the man who would become Spain's most hated enemy: Francis Drake, the English pirate/privateer.

Drake, then on his first major independent voyage, came in July 1572 to the isthmus, looking to loot Spanish treasure. Finding African slaves loading wood on an island outside Nombre de Dios, he asked them about the town's defenses. (The slaves had been left by their owners, who presumably intended to return for them; Drake set them ashore, so that they could run away.) The English attacked at 3:00 a.m. on July 29 in a flurry of gunfire. The exchange wounded Drake badly enough that his men pulled back, regretfully leaving behind, according to his authorized biography, "a pile of barres of silver, of (as neere as we could guesse) seventie foot in length, of ten foot in breadth, and twelve foot in hight." Drake was not discouraged. Just after he set off for Nombre de Dios, the men whom he had left behind to guard his ships were hailed by an African—a maroon offering the assistance of his fellows.

After some fumbling about, Drake met in September with a maroon captain, Pedro Mandinga. To the dismay of the English, Mandinga told them that the flow of silver from Peru had stopped for the year. The next shipments would not occur until March, when the rainy season ended. Drake decided to wait. With Mandinga, he devised a plan to steal silver not on the coast, but in Venta de Cruces, a transshipment area on the Chagre River where mule trains were unloaded onto barges. Mandinga sent spies into Panamá to find out when the silver ships would arrive. Meanwhile, the English hid from Spanish eyes in a cove west of Nombre de Dios, their victuals largely provided by maroon bows and fish hooks. Waiting was riskier than the English anticipated; yellow fever killed half their number in December. Among the victims was Drake's younger brother, Joseph. (Another brother had died a few weeks before.)

Early in February 1573 Mandinga and twenty-nine other maroons led Drake and eighteen surviving buccaneers through the forest toward the Pacific. They moved in total silence, military style, maroons deploying ahead

of the English, to mark the trail, and behind, to cover their tracks. After reaching Venta de Cruces in the morning of February 14, the party waited for the silver in the long grass by the side of the highway. Because the first stretch of the road on the Pacific side passed through low, open grassland, the mule trains traveled by night, to avoid the sun. (Later, in the deep forest, they traveled by day.) Within a few hours of Drake's arrival one of Mandinga's spies in Panamá delivered some news. The treasurer of the regional government in Lima was leaving town with fourteen mules, nine of them laden with gold and jewels. Behind him would follow two mule trains, each of fifty to seventy animals, carrying silver.

The pirates and maroons split into two groups, one led by Drake, the other by Mandinga, about fifty yards apart from each other on the road. Drake's group would let the mule train pass until it could be ambushed by Mandinga's group. Then Drake and his men would close in from the rear, trapping the convoy fore and aft. Late in the evening the attackers heard the bells on the harnesses of the approaching mules. As soon as they came into view, an English sailor in Drake's group charged drunkenly out of hiding, waving his weapon. One of the maroons yanked him back into the grass, but the damage was done—a Spanish advance scout had spotted the sailor's white shirt in the moonlight. The scout wheeled about his horse, galloped back to the mule train, and told the treasurer to turn back to Panamá. The chagrined English rampaged through Venta de Cruces, wrecking warehouses and spoiling stores. But they found little and so fled to the coast, led by Mandinga. The maroons learned a lesson: Europeans were unreliable allies.

While Drake pondered his next move, his men spotted a ship belonging to a French pirate named Guillaume le Testu, who had learned that the English were on the isthmus and had been trying to find them for weeks. A fine cartographer who had helped found a short-lived French colony near Rio de Janeiro, Testu had been jailed for four years in France because of his Protestant faith. Freed after protests to the king, he had accepted a privateering commission, probably from Italian merchants. Now he hoped to join with Drake in swiping Spanish treasure. Drake, Testu, and Mandinga agreed to work together and take a silver convoy as it descended the hills in the outskirts of Nombre de Dios.

Again maroons led Europeans in a silent march through the forest, arriving at the ambush site on April 1. Again they split into two groups fifty yards apart along the road. In midmorning the waiting pirates and maroons heard bells—120 mules, the biography said, "every [one] of which caryed 300. Pound weight of silver, which in all amounted to neere thirty Tun." This

time the scheme succeeded. The guards fled, leaving the convoy in the hands of the pirates. Giddy but too weary to lug all the silver through the hills, the Anglo-Franco-Afro-Indian force stripped the mules of their glittering burden and in true pirate fashion buried the booty at the bottom of a nearby stream. They carried away a few silver bars as trophies. Not until they were miles from the ambush did they realize that a Frenchman was missing. Later they learned that he had gotten drunk while burying silver and missed their departure. He was caught by Spanish troops and revealed, under torture, the location of the silver. From Nombre de Dios, the biography reported, "Neere 2000. Spaniards and Negroes [went out] to dig and search for it." They tore apart the area, found the precious metal, and transported it to Nombre de Dios. Drake's men, returning, were only able to find "thirteen bars of silver, and some few quoits of Gold"—less than 2 percent of the shipment.

Decades later, Philip Nichols, who had served as Drake's chaplain and become a friend, compiled surviving sailors' reminiscences of the expedition, passed the manuscript by Drake for editorial approval, and published the result—the authorized biography I have been quoting—under the curious title of *Sir Francis Drake Revived*. The book portrays Drake's sojourn in the isthmus—a time when he failed three times to seize large quantities of silver and lost half his men to disease and battle, including two of his brothers—as a rousing success. This view is not entirely wrong. The assaults on Nombre de Dios and Venta de Cruces *were* a triumph—for the maroons.

"CAPITULATIONS"

Reports of the maroon-pirate alliance appalled the Spanish crown, especially given that the Nombre de Dios merchants who reported the seizure of the silver shipment neglected to inform the government that they in fact had recovered almost all of the stolen money. (Much of the silver was tax payments for the court, so its disappearance truly stung.) Colonial officials used the incident to demand that the king send the fleet to clean out the maroons. "What grieves us most is to see with our own eyes the ruin of this realm imminent unless your majesty remedy the situation promptly," the governors of Nombre de Dios claimed a month after the attack. The court, justifiably fearful of being cheated, dragged its feet. While colonial officials dithered, sometimes trying to negotiate with Afro-Indian communities, sometimes seeking to raze them, maroons continued to steal cattle, free slaves, and kill Spaniards. Some of the dead Spaniards were priests; in their hatred of Catholic Spain, the maroons had happily let Drake convert them to

Protestantism. (No evidence exists that they actually changed their previous religious practice.) Even when the two sides finally committed to negotiating, their mutual suspicion and hostility made progress agonizingly slow.

All the while, English, French, and Dutch pirates were coming to the isthmus, asking the maroons to help them as they had helped Drake. Most didn't get any assistance—the maroons seem to have acquired a low opinion of European competence. Nonetheless, Spanish fears of a maroon-pirate alliance continued to grow, reaching a kind of frenzy in 1578 and 1579, as the now-infamous Drake sailed up the Pacific coast of South America on another voyage, wrecking Spanish possessions along the way. Colonial officials approached Domingo Congo, leader of the regrouped maroons in Bayano's territory, with a deal: if his maroons promised to be loyal to the king, they would be given good farmland, cattle, and pigs, tilling and harvesting equipment, a year's worth of maize seed, and—most important—their liberty. As lagniappe, the colonists promised to exempt them from the taxes paid by Spanish residents. The terms were attractive, but Domingo Congo hesitated to accept—every maroon knew what had happened to Bayano when he negotiated with Spaniards. The colonists, for their part, were leery of rewarding people whom they viewed as thieves, murderers, and stolen property. Despite their distaste, though, they issued similar offers to the scatter of runaway groups in the hills outside Panamá town and the bigger, more centralized maroon "kingdom" near the planned location of Portobelo.

Portobelo's "king" put his mark on the treaty on September 15, 1579. The action delighted Felipe II, king of Spain. Four months later, when Domingo Congo's maroons in Bayano hadn't followed suit, the king urged the colonial government to close the deal:

> Because of the great importance of subduing the maroon blacks for the peace and quiet of these lands, we took great contentment in learning from your letter of the good state you have reached with them in Portobelo and we expect that their example can make those of Bayano understand the great favor that they will have from pardoning their crimes and the safe places they will live in and the other benefits that will follow the capitulation that you will send to our Council of the Indies.

"Capitulation"? The term *capitulación* means both "contract" and "military surrender." That is, the king described giving the maroons almost everything they wanted in exchange for ending a notional alliance with foreign pirates as a surrender—*by the maroons*. True, the maroons did not get to return to their African homes. But that would have been next to impossible; even had the colonists not reenslaved the maroons once they were confined on a ship, they wouldn't have known where to return them. Moreover, many maroons by this point had wives from other parts of Africa and the Americas. For better and worse, the isthmus had become their home. By "capitulating," they won the lasting, if uneasy, freedom to live as they wished, tax-free, in their own communities.

Two years later, Domingo Congo signed the treaty, as did the maroons outside Panamá. These agreements did not stop future escapes, as Tardieu, the University of La Réunion historian, has noted. Indeed, runaways continued to disappear into the forest until the end of the slave trade. Many escapees filtered into free maroon villages. By 1819, when the isthmus won its freedom from Spain, these communities' origin had been almost forgotten. Maroons had won the highest kind of liberty—they were ordinary citizens.*

The story is not exceptional. Although governments throughout the Americas wiped out many maroon groups, others won their freedom—along with the later anonymity that was its concomitant. A few examples are worth listing, if only because slaves' prospects for autonomy are all too often portrayed as completely dependent on the goodwill of their masters.

Mexico

Even as Spain was giving in to Africans who menaced the silver road in Panamá, it was facing Africans who menaced the silver road in Mexico. Sporadic, small-scale violence in the sugarlands of Veracruz flared into full-scale revolt after about 1570, with the escape of Gaspar Yanga or Nyanga, said to be a prince and general in what is now Ghana. Like Aqualtune in Palmares, he may actually have been one. Yanga, by all accounts a compelling, canny figure, united hundreds of Africans into a confederation in the mountains outside Veracruz. Driven by a kind of serene fury toward the people who had taken him in chains across the ocean, he led countless raids of sugar plantations, gleefully snatching slaves and provisions. Most important to New Spain, the maroons attacked convoys carrying silk and silver on the Veracruz–Mexico City road. Horrified colonists spread rumors that the maroons killed anyone who saw their faces and drank their victims' blood in Satanic ceremonies.

* They were not spared racial discrimination, of course. The ex-maroons were free to be treated just the same—just as badly, that is—as other free citizens of African descent.

The colonial government, confounded by the rugged terrain, did little about the assaults until Yanga's forces committed the unforgivable sin of destroying a shipment of the most recent fashions from Europe. A military expedition of a hundred soldiers, an equal number of Indians, and two hundred colonists and their slaves charged into the mountains in January 1609. Six weeks later they occupied Yanga's base—and accomplished nothing, because the maroons had evacuated to a second, more remote base. Yanga dispatched a Spanish prisoner with eleven nonnegotiable demands, chief among them "that all those who escaped before last September will be free." The discouraged colonists accepted all eleven. Like the maroons of Bayano and Portobelo, Yanga's people were presented with their own domain: San Lorenzo de los Negros. Later renamed Yanga, honoring its founder, it was the Americas' first sunset town: Europeans were legally prohibited from staying the night there. Yanga and his descendants prospered so much that local Spaniards eventually paid them the ultimate compliment and moved in, ignoring the ban on whites. As a result, the town of Yanga is now almost completely "Mexican."

Two other, legally free African towns are known in Mexico proper, one in the mountains west of Veracruz and one on Mexico's west coast. But the maroons' greatest success may have occurred in the eighteenth century, on the Pacific coast of Guatemala. A hotbed of maroon activity, it was assaulted by Spain until its militia ran out of soldiers—a problem the government solved by replacing the militia with the Afro-Indian groups they were attacking. Once they controlled the army, the maroons used subtle threats to persuade officials to remove the last vestiges of slavery.

Nicaragua

English Pilgrims launched two colonies: the famous Plimoth, the first successful colony in New England, in 1620; and a short-lived effort in Providence Island, 140 miles off the coast of Nicaragua, in 1631. Unlike their brethren in non-malarial New England, the Providence Pilgrims imported African slaves in numbers and with enthusiasm. As many as six hundred escaped when Spain drove out the Pilgrims in 1641. Landing in what is now Nicaragua by either shipwreck or design, they ended up mixing with Miskitu-speaking Indians and a small number of Europeans. More African and Indian refugees kept trickling in, swelling the ranks of the Miskitu, as these hybrid people came to be called. Viewing Spain as the biggest potential threat, they allied with the English who had previously enslaved some of their number. Riding with English buccaneers, armed with English swords and English guns, they

Francisco de Arobe (middle) led Esmeraldas, an independent maroon society on the north coast of Ecuador. In 1599, two years after signing a treaty in which de Arobe accepted nominal Spanish sovereignty in return for a free hand in Esmeraldas, the colonial governor commissioned Andrés Sánchez Gallque, an Indian trained in Quito, to make this portrait of the leader, his twenty-two-year-old son, and a friend.

raided Spanish plantations from Costa Rica to Panama, capturing Indian and African slaves and selling them to English sugar plantations; once the Miskitu even sent troops to Jamaica to help the English put down a maroon rebellion. London sealed the alliance by staging coronation ceremonies for Miskitu kings in Jamaica, Belize or, occasionally, England. "King" was the word used at the time but is perhaps misleading; the Miskitu "kingdom" was a collection of four allied polities along the coast ruled by (from north to south) a "general," a "king," a "governor," and an "admiral."

As European diseases took their toll on Miskitu with native-American ancestry, all four areas became more African, genetically speaking. Culturally speaking, though, they increasingly claimed to be "pure" Indian—a claim that seems strangely at odds with their kings' habits of performing their functions in gold-spangled military uniforms with white satin or cotton vests, breeches, and stockings, leaning on the gold- and silver-headed walking canes that had become a symbol of their office. Thousands of Britons moved into the area in the nineteenth century, paying taxes to Miskitu governments and promising to obey Miskitu laws. If they began to throw their weight around, the Miskitu would remind the British of the usefulness of having an ally on the otherwise solidly Spanish expanse of Central America. The kingdom thrived, controlling its own destiny, for more than three cen-

turies. Only in 1894 did the now-independent nation of Nicaragua formally incorporate it.

The United States

Maroons were fewer in the United States than farther south, because slaves could escape bondage altogether if they traveled north of the Mason-Dixon line. In addition, they found it harder to survive on their own in unfamiliar temperate ecosystems. Nonetheless, maroon encampments were common in places like the valley of the Savannah River, the Mississippi River delta, and, especially, the Great Dismal Swamp, a peat bog that then sprawled across more than two thousand square miles of Virginia and North Carolina. (It is now smaller, because much of the swamp was drained in the nineteenth century.) To escape European incursions, Indians moved there in numbers after about 1630, living in scattered, small settlements of ten to fifty houses. Africans soon followed. Thousands eventually made their base there, according to the historians John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, building villages on raised "islands" in the rarely seen heart of the swamp. Hidden from slaveholding society, some maroons had children who reportedly went their entire lives without encountering a European. This happy isolation ended at the end of the seventeenth century, when Virginia initiated big swamp-drainage projects, sending thousands of slaves to dig drainage canals in wretched conditions. Would-be maroons and would-be maroon-hunters alike used the canals to penetrate the marsh, setting off low-intensity guerrilla warfare that did not truly let up until the end of U.S. slavery. (Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, wrote her second novel, *Dred*, about the Great Dismal Swamp in that time of conflict.) By that time, though, the establishment of the "underground railroad" to freedom in the north had robbed the swamp of much of its allure.

Farther south, the best hope for slaves who wished to rid themselves of their bonds was the Spanish colony of Florida. Carolina was founded in 1670 (I described this in Chapter 3). Large numbers of slaves began to arrive a few years after. Quickly they began to escape, also in large numbers, crossing the border into Spanish Florida. A few Europeans, fleeing for one reason or another from their colonial governments, took refuge there as well. Seeing the military potential in these England-hating maroons, the Spanish king promised in 1693 to grant automatic liberty to all Africans who came to Florida from the Carolinas and Georgia, provided that they (1) agreed to convert to Christianity; and (2) promised to stand by Spain and fight any English invasion. Near the Spanish capital of St. Augustine the colonial government in 1739 established a new town, Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mosé, to

house what amounted to a militia of ex-bondsmen—the first legally recognized free African-American community north of the Rio Grande. (Other free maroon communities surely existed, but were not officially viewed as legitimate.) Most Florida maroons, though, went deep into the interior of the peninsula, territory dominated by Seminole Indians, a group that had split off from the Creeks decades before, taking over land that had been depopulated by disease. In this low, sandy area, a savannah that had been annually burned for hundreds of years, the two groups formed a strong but carefully delineated alliance.

That any two groups of Indians and Africans would cooperate was not a given—just north of Florida, the main body of the Creek enthusiastically hunted maroons and sold them to the English. Ultimately the Seminole established more than thirty towns, some with thousands of inhabitants, all surrounded by farmland, polycropped in the indigenous mode. Four of those towns were mainly inhabited by Africans—Black Seminole, as they are often called. The relationship between "red" and "black" Seminole was complex, beginning with the fact that some Africans were "red" and some European

European societies invariably portrayed their conflicts with maroons as victories. The Battle of Okeechobee, fought on Christmas Day, 1837, during the Second Seminole War, ended with the U.S. forces being driven back with twice as many dead and many more wounded than the Seminoles. Much of the blame for the disaster belongs to Col. Zachary Taylor, the commanding officer and future president, who foolishly insisted that the Seminoles would flee if attacked directly. Yet this typical engraving from 1878 depicts the Seminoles melting away before Taylor's heroic, bayonet-wielding charge.

refugees were "black." Under Seminole law, most Africans in those towns had the legal status of slaves, but native bondage resembled European feudalism more than European slavery. Seminole slaves owed little work; instead they were supposed to provide native villages with tribute, usually in the form of crops. The burden, though of course unwelcome and resented, usually was not onerous. Many of the slaves were African soldiers, disciplined and organized as one would expect from prisoners of war in wartime. Determined to establish themselves, maroons opened up trade with the Spanish and as a group became more prosperous than their Indian owners. For the most apart they lived adjacent to but carefully separate from the Seminole, unincorporated into the big kinship-linked clans that were a principal aspect of Indian social networks. Yet they willingly joined their owners in common fights, of which there were, alas, all too many.

The Seminole faced a parade of adversaries. England took over Florida in 1763; the Seminole resisted all efforts at incorporation. Twenty years later, the United States came into existence; the English stopped seeking to dominate the Seminole and instead asked them to ally with them against the new nation (England had held on to Florida after the revolution). In 1812, the Seminole violently opposed U.S. efforts to annex Florida. Another flareup occurred in 1816–18; many Seminole, black and red, were driven south to new settlements, the biggest of which, Angola, was at the mouth of the Manatee River in Tampa Bay. Some fled to the Bahamas. In both cases the Seminole received covert support from British guerrillas. Conflict grew more intense still when the United States took over Florida in 1821 and the government, responding to popular pressure, planned to "remove" the native peoples of the Southeast, the Seminole among them, to Indian Territory, a big reservation in what is now Oklahoma. Overt war began in 1835. Maroons joined in, fighting as allies but under their own command.

The Seminole strategy was twofold: First, they destroyed the plantations that supplied U.S. troops, capturing their slaves to bolster the native army. Second, they waited for yellow fever and malaria to kill northern soldiers. If they got in a jam, they pretended to negotiate until the onset of the "sickly season" forced U.S. forces to withdraw. It was so brilliantly successful that in 1839 Thomas Sidney Jesup, commander of the U.S. army in Florida, wrote to Washington, D.C., to ask permission to give the Seminole everything they wanted if they would simply stop wrecking plantations. The idea was indignantly rejected, but Jesup did come up with what would eventually become a winning strategy: he promised that any Africans who gave up fighting and consented to settle in the West would be given their liberty. Slowly the offer pried apart the Seminole-maroon alliance. Its success was understandable, as the abolitionist Joshua Gibbons recognized, for it gave the maroons "that

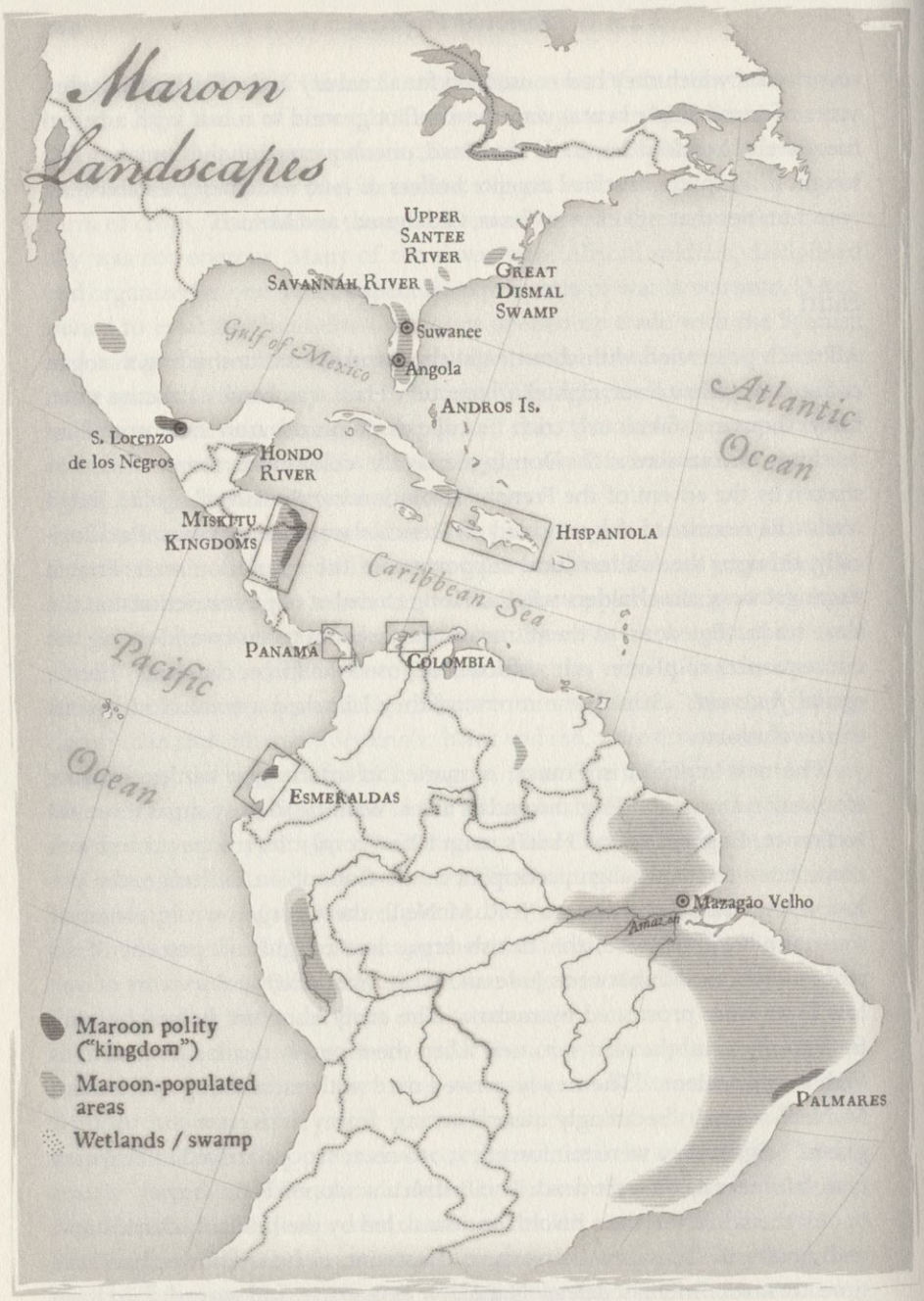
security for which they had contended for a century and a half." After seven years of increasingly brutal war, the conflict ground to a halt with a cease-fire. Several hundred Seminole remained, unconquered, on the land they had fought to keep; the rest had accepted offers of land and liberty, establishing communities that still exist in Texas, Oklahoma, and Mexico.

Haiti

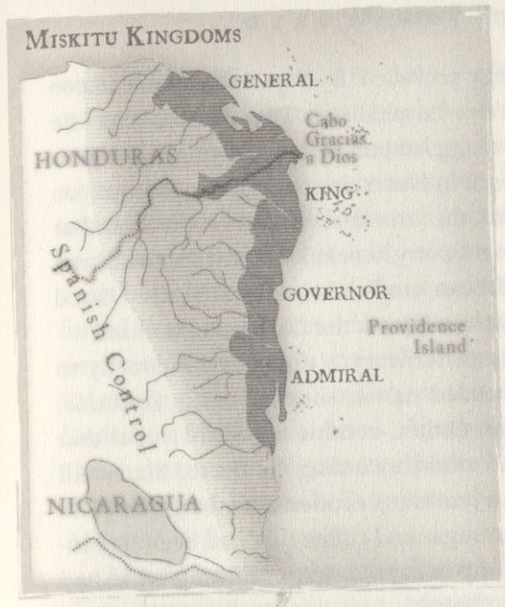
A French possession with about eight thousand plantations rich with sugar, coffee, and yellow fever, eighteenth-century Haiti was a true extractive state: forty thousand fabulously rich European colonists atop half a million seething African slaves. St. Domingue, as the colony was then called, was shaken by the advent of the French Revolution in 1789. *Liberté, egalité, fraternité!*—the resonance, for an island of French slaves, was obvious. Paradoxically, though, the loudest local supporters of the revolution were French sugar growers, slaveholders who had long chafed at royal restrictions on the slave trade. (Freedom, to them, meant the freedom to enslave.) Fearing the consequences of planter rule, Africans opposed the forces chanting "*Liberté, egalité, fraternité!*" Seizing the moment, they launched a revolution against the revolution.

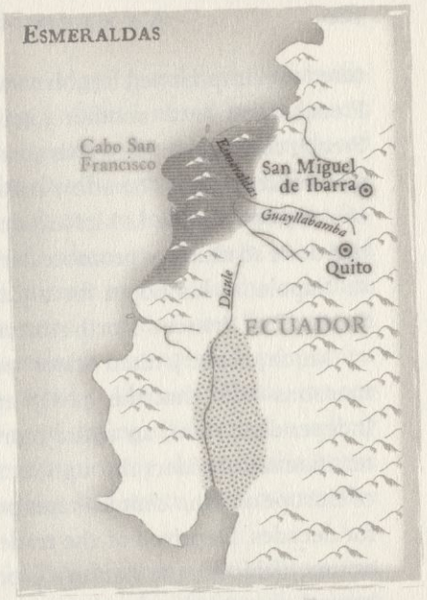
The new republic in France, ensnarled in internecine battles, became involved in a war with England and its allies. Wanting to deny sugar revenues to France, England seized Haiti's main cities in 1793. Its troops proved welcome hosts to that malign participant in the Columbian Exchange, the yellow fever virus. According to J. R. McNeill, the Georgetown historian of mosquito-borne disease, the British army lost roughly 10 percent of its troops every month between June and November of 1794. Survivors of yellow fever were prostrated by malaria. The army hung on, helped by reinforcements, until the next summer, when the monthly death rate rose to as high as 22 percent. "The newly arrived died with astonishing quickness," McNeill wrote, "seemingly disembarking from ships straight to their graves." Again they were reinforced: 13,000 more troops arrived in February 1796. In weeks 6,000 were dead. The British abandoned Haiti in 1798.

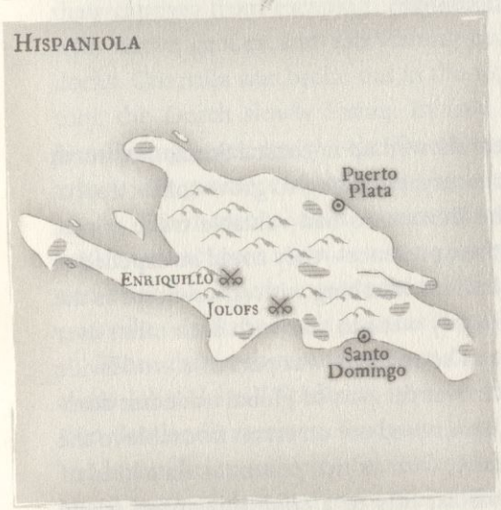
All the while the slave revolt continued, led by the brilliant, charismatic, and dictatorial Toussaint Louverture. Toussaint, as he is known, had little time to savor Britain's defeat. Napoleon Bonaparte had staged a coup in France and determined to retain the immensely profitable sugar and coffee plantations of Haiti. A French force of perhaps 65,000 landed in February 1802. Toussaint had barely half as many men and so little equipment and weaponry that his army was, he said, "naked as earthworms." He ordered his rebels to retreat to the hills and await the fever season. Toussaint was cap-

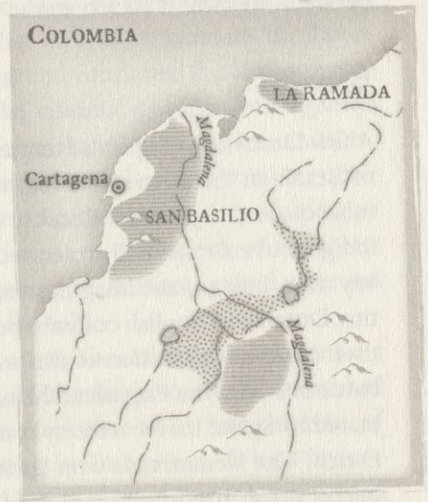


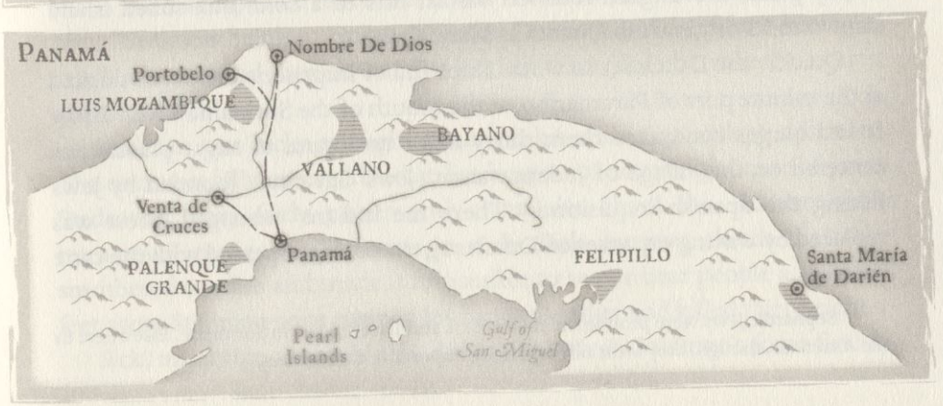
In the centuries of the slave trade, flight was frequent and often successful. Mixing with native groups, escaped Africans and their descendants scattered across the hemisphere. Many formed Afro-Indian polities, microstates that often won de facto independence from Spain—a tenacious struggle for liberty that created large free areas in the Americas decades and even centuries before the U. S. Declaration of Independence.











tured and imprisoned but his strategy prevailed. By September some 28,000 French were dead; another 4,400 were hospitalized. Two months later the French commander died. His army struggled on, but it was trying to conquer its own cemetery. The effort collapsed in November 1803, having lost 50,000 of its 65,000 troops. As McNeill noted, the same malaria and yellow fever that had done so much to promote African slavery here helped Africans to destroy it. Napoleon, his hopes for a Caribbean empire in ruins, sold the United States all of France's North American territories: the Louisiana Purchase.

Much of the United States' present territory is thus owed indirectly to maroons—not that the newly expanded nation showed much gratitude. Independent Haiti, an entire maroon nation, became a global symbol that terrified slaveholders throughout the world, including the United States. All of Europe and the United States put a punishing economic embargo on Haiti for decades. Deprived of the trade in sugar and coffee that had been its economic lifeblood, the nation's economy collapsed, impoverishing what had been the wealthiest society in the Caribbean.

Suriname

A few Dutch and English adventurers showed up in coastal Suriname, north of Brazil, in the early seventeenth century, intending to grow coffee, cocoa, tobacco, and sugarcane. Because the Europeans had valuable trade goods, indigenous rulers initially tolerated their presence—they could be expelled at any time. Indeed, one imagines the Indians watching with amusement as the tiny Dutch and English colonies promptly went to war with each other over their notional possession of the area. The struggle was part of a worldwide battle between the English and Dutch over the part of global trade not dominated by Spain. In 1667 a treaty was hammered out on terms favorable to the Dutch. The Netherlands won Suriname, with its rich potential. As a kind of booby prize, the English received official title to a cold, thin-soiled island known to its original inhabitants as Mannahatta.

Quickly the Dutch set to work. Ships full of imprisoned Africans docked at the minute port of Paramaribo, at the mouth of the Suriname River. Slave-rowed barges conducted them thirty miles upstream, to sugar plantations centered on the village of Jodensavanne (Jews' Savanna), founded by Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition.* There the Indians' managed forest was replaced by waving expanses of Dutch sugarcane. Interspersed with the cane

* Sephardic Jews were prominent landowners and slaveholders in Suriname. Elsewhere in the Americas, though, they were not especially important slaveowners.

were fields of African rice. As in the Caribbean, logging and farming benefitted mosquitoes, especially *Anopheles darlingi*, which I noted in Chapter 3 was South America's most important malaria vector. Slave ships introduced *Aedes aegypti*, the yellow fever mosquito. The slaves themselves brought falciparum malaria and yellow fever. All went upstream to Jodensavanne. *A. darlingi* likes to breed in recently cleared land, where it can dash back and forth between the edge of the forest and human houses. As the colonists forced slaves to cut trees, European death rates soared. Dutch landowners responded by staying home and hiring overseers to manage their properties. "Managing properties" mainly meant importing Africans. About 300,000 landed on Suriname's shores. Another way of saying this is that a colony about the size of Wisconsin absorbed nearly as many slaves as the entire United States. For each European, the colony had more than twenty-five Africans.

As one would expect, the few malarial Dutch were unable to prevent their captives from escaping. Africans ran away by the thousands, mixing with native groups and establishing outlaw hybrid societies in the boondocks. Guerrilla war broke out in the 1670s and continued for almost a century, the Dutch slowly losing. In 1762 the colonial government signed a humiliating peace treaty—the Dutch signatories, following African custom, reluctantly guaranteed the peace by cutting themselves and drinking their blood. The maroons' main concession was to promise that they would give back new escapees. As a result, runaways went to other parts of the forest and established new communities. Efforts to pursue them ignited a second guerrilla war. Suriname's planters begged for help.

More than a thousand soldiers came across the Atlantic in 1772, among them John Gabriel Stedman, born in the Netherlands to a father who had fled Scotland's famines. Stedman kept a diary that is an encyclopedia of medico-military calamity. Soon after landing he "became so ill by a fever—that I was not expected more to recover." None of the other soldiers helped him: "Seekness being so common in this Country, and every one having so much ado to mind themselves, that neglect takes place betwixt the nearest acquaintances."

Stedman was lucky enough to survive his seasoning and go upstream. The once carefully managed Indian landscape was now a nightmare of pests. Stedman's diary fairly pulses with complaint about the "inconceivable numerous" mosquitoes—insects in such thick, buzzing clouds that they smothered candles and made it impossible to see or hear people a hundred feet away. Stedman once clapped his hands together and killed thirty-eight.

Sick, miserable, insect-bitten, dressed in tatters, Stedman's force futilely

chased runaway slaves through the forest for three years. They fought exactly one battle. They won that battle, as the adage goes, but lost the war. "Out of a number of near twelve hundred Able bodied men, now not one hundred did return to theyr Friends at home," Stedman wrote sadly, "Amongst whom Perhaps not 20 were to be found in perfect health." All the others, he said, were "sick; discharged, past all Remedy; Lost; kill'd; & murdered by the Climate, while no less than 10 or 12 were drown'd & Snapt away by the Alligators."

Eventually the Dutch and the maroons reached a kind of accommodation. The Europeans kept shipping in Africans and growing cane, accepting that a certain number of slaves would escape each year. Meanwhile, most of the Dutch colonists stayed as little as they could; in 1850, after two centuries of colonization, Suriname had perhaps eight thousand European residents, most of them agents for sugar planters who lived safely in the Netherlands. Not residing in the colony, the growers had little interest in creating the institutions that underlie a productive society. Every scrap of profit went back to the home country; education, innovation, and investment in Suriname were almost entirely ignored. When Suriname became independent in 1975, it was one of the poorest countries in the world.

Naturally, the new nation sought development. Suriname has large deposits of bauxite, gold, diamond, and oil and more tropical forest per capita than any other nation. The cash-strapped government—both the military dictatorship that seized power in 1980 and its civilian successor, which began in 1992—awarded mining and timber rights to foreign companies. In the 1960s, the colonial government had let Alcoa, the big aluminum company, build a six-hundred-square-mile lake to feed a hydroelectric dam for aluminum refining. Now the independent government awarded China International Marine Containers, the world's biggest container-manufacturing firm, the rights to log almost eight hundred square miles to make wooden shipping pallets. Other firms followed suit. By 2007 some 40 percent of the country's surface area had been leased for logging.

All the while the government was fending off environmentalists' criticism by creating parks. At a joint press conference in 1998 with Conservation International, the nation announced that it had set aside six thousand square miles—10 percent of its territory—to create the Central Suriname Nature Reserve, the world's biggest protected tropical forest. "Suriname's example," *The New York Times* editorialized, is "a small ray of hope." UNESCO named the park a World Heritage Site in 2000, lauding it as "one of the very few undisturbed forest areas in the Amazonian region with no inhabitants and no human use."

Beginning with the blood-drinking treaty of 1762, the Dutch had recognized the autonomy of six maroon groups, of which the biggest today are the Saramaka and Ndyuka, with about fifty thousand people each. None had been apprised beforehand about the logging and mining concessions, though many were on their land. None had been consulted about the dam, which inundated maroon villages (in a further insult, the turbines silted up and are now useless). Nor had they been asked about the park, which includes part of the homeland of the Kwinti, the smallest of the six maroon groups, who have been in that area since about 1750. (It also houses an Indian group called the Trio.) The government's actions led a coalition of Saramaka leaders to file a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in October 2000. Angered, Suriname's president charged that the Saramaka petition showed that they wanted to ally with Colombian narco-guerrillas to foment civil war. The government vowed to continue opening land to logging and mining, a stance it reiterated when the commission ordered that the process be suspended, and reiterated again in November 2007, when the Inter-American Court of Human Rights demanded that Suriname give the Saramaka control over their resources.

The nation has not complied, as of the time of this writing. Indeed, the jousting among maroons, governments, and large corporations seems likely to last for years. The stakes are nothing less than the future of the tropical forest itself, and the maroons are not fighting only in Suriname.

SHAKE IT, OX!

In 1991 Maria do Rosario Costa Cabral and her siblings bought twenty-five acres on the banks of Igarapé Espinel (Espinel Creek), a sub-sub-tributary of the Amazon in Amapá, Brazil's northeasternmost province. A wiry, watchful woman of sixty-two, Dona Rosario was born into a maroon community called Ipanema—a place so poor, she told me, that families cut their matches in half lengthwise to make a box last twice as long. Her father spent his days as a rubber tapper, toting the latex to one of the small natural-rubber distributors that still hang on in the area. If he and his friends showed up with a lot of rubber, wealthier people would realize they had found an especially productive group of trees. They would figure out the location, force out the rubber tappers, and take over. The same thing happened with their farms. They would acquire abandoned land—a plantation that had failed twenty or thirty years before—and pull out a few harvests. Just as the family was settling in, men with guns would show up. You are squatters, they would say. If they had

a contract, they would say the title was invalid. Leave now, they would say, touching their weapons. Little changed when Dona Rosario reached adulthood. Repeatedly she set up farms and repeatedly she was pushed off them. Still, she jumped at the opportunity to buy the land on Igarapé Espinel.

To non-Amazonians, the property wouldn't have seemed worth troubling about. It is located about two hundred miles from the river's mouth, where the Amazon is so large that it acts like a tidal body—tides flood the area twice a day. The force is so large that deep within the forest nameless streams well over their banks and march inland, sometimes for miles. People build their homes on stilts and paddle their canoes between the trees. Even when the surface is exposed, it is thick with gooey mud. I visited Dona Rosario's farm recently with Susanna Hecht, the UCLA geographer. The mud soon covered us to our knees and practically ripped the boots from our feet.

Dona Rosario told us that she got the property cheap, because it had been ravaged by the heart of palm craze of the late 1980s, when every fashionable menu from London to Los Angeles had to feature heart of palm salad. Heart of palm is the growing tip and inner core of young palm trees, particularly South American species like açai (*Euterpe oleracea*), jucura (*Euterpe edulis*), and pupunha (peach palm, *Bactris gasipae*). Determined to wring every penny out of the forest that they could, palm hunters scoured the lower Amazon with the implacability of paid assassins. Barges discharged crews with axes and winches who chopped down entire palm groves to obtain the edible tips (the hearts can be removed without killing the tree, but this takes more time). If they spotted anything else that looked valuable, they took that, too. "The land was looted," Dona Rosario told us. "It was a mass of vines and scrub."

She set out to bring it back with techniques she had learned from her father in the region of her birth. With help from her sisters and brothers, she planted fast-growing timber trees for sawmills upriver. For the market, they put in fruit trees: limes, coconut, cupuaçu (a relative of cacao prized for its fragrant pulp, rather than its seeds), and açaí (formerly used for heart of palm, the tree has purple fruit that produce a yogurt-like pulp). With woven shrimp traps—identical to those in West Africa, Hecht told me—the family caught shrimp and kept them alive in cages that drifted in the creek. At the river's edge they encouraged shrubs that made habitat for fish and fry and planted trees with seeds and fruit that would attract them into the flooded forest. To an outside visitor, the result looked like a wild tropical landscape. The difference was that almost every species in it had been selected and tended by Dona Rosario and her family.

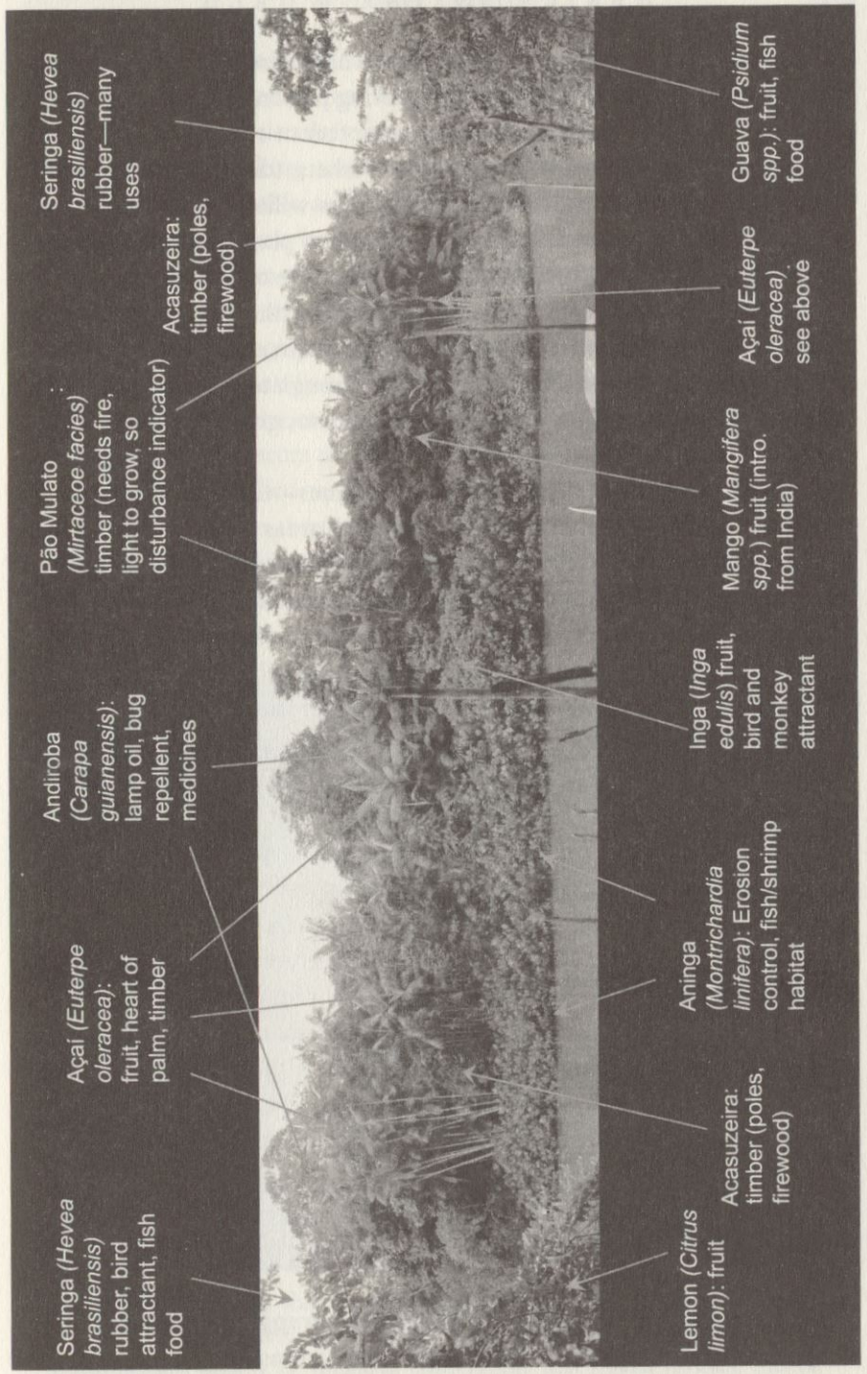
Dona Rosario lives on the fringes of a sprawling *quilombo* complex cen-

Hundreds of *quilombos* were established in the lower Amazon, a maze of rivers that tidally spill over their banks twice a day, washing a mile or more into the interior. Because the rivers are the main transport routes, villages spread out along the banks (top, Anauerapucu, in the state of Macapá); houses are built on stilts (bottom, in Mazagão Velho) to let the tidewater pass beneath the floorboards.

tered on Mazagão Velho (Old Mazagão), founded in 1770 by transplanting almost entire the last Portuguese colony in North Africa. The year before, the inhabitants had fled before a Muslim army, arriving as a body in Lisbon. Treating defeat as opportunity, the Portuguese court ordered the community to resettle en masse in Amapá, where its presence was supposed to thwart potential incursions by French Guiana, Amapá's northern neighbor. A Genoese engineer designed the new town as a graceful Enlightenment-era city, complete with public squares and gridded streets. Slaves actually built more than two hundred houses in what was then called Vila Nova Mazagão (Mazagão New Town); the Portuguese may have moved as many as 1,900 people into them. The transition was eased by grants of cash, livestock, and several hundred slaves. Soon the newcomers made the unhappy discovery that the lower Amazon, unlike the dry, breezy Moroccan coast, is hot and humid—it is located almost exactly on the equator. Within a decade of arrival the colonists—malarial, famished, living in wretched huts they were too poor to repair—were begging the crown to relocate them. Ultimately, almost all of the surviving Europeans slipped away. The remainder soon died. Through no act of their own, the slaves found themselves at liberty. Vila Nova Mazagão had become a *quilombo*.

They were free as long as they pretended they weren't. The Portuguese administration wanted to be able to report to the king that his subjects were guarding Brazil's northern flank. The slaves were willing to say they were doing it, if that meant they would be left alone. Everyone was happy: the maroons pretended they were Portuguese subjects in a Portuguese colony and the Portuguese pretended the maroons were guarding the frontier. As the decades went by, the descendants of the colony's Africans spread out along the riverbanks, living much like their Indian neighbors. The river supplied fish and shrimp, the small-scale garden cultivation yielded manioc, the trees provided everything else. Two centuries of constant tending and harvesting structured the forest. Mixing together native and African techniques, maroons created landscapes lush enough to be mistaken for pristine wilderness.

So did others. Portuguese euphoria from the destruction of Palmares had been short-lived. Slaves continued to escape and to live in the forest. But they didn't repeat the mistake of forming big, centralized communities like Palmares. Instead they created ten thousand or more small villages in a flexible, shifting network that spread across much of eastern Brazil and the lower Amazon. They mixed with extant native settlements, collected Indian slave escapees, threw open their doors to Portuguese misfits and criminals. Many Africans had lived in tropical environments before being shipped across the ocean. They were comfortable in hot, wet places where people farmed palms



To inexpert eyes, the riverbank across from Maria do Rosario's home looks like a typical tropical hodgepodge. But almost every plant in this image was sown and tended by Rosario and her family, creating an environment as ecologically rich as it is artificial.

and kept trapfuls of shrimp in the stream. They were happy to learn when Indians showed them how to fish by scattering poison in a tributary or make protective "boots" by melting latex over their feet or squeeze the bitter compounds out of manioc with long, tubular baskets. Ideologically opposed to "going native," the Portuguese were much less willing to adjust. In consequence, the forest seemed dangerous to them, a place to be ventured into only with an army. Ceding the field to *quilombos,* the colonists were only partially aware that the escaped slaves were living within a short walk of the plantations, as in Calabar or Liberdade. In consequence, the *quilombos* were left largely alone—unless they were unlucky enough to be in the path of gold miners, rubber tappers, or other people who sought quick wealth in the forest.

Brazil has a host of hybrid spiritual regimes—Candomblé, Umbanda, Macumba, Santería—often focused on special areas where Afro-Brazilians drum, dance, and practice the ritualized martial art of capoeira. In their isolation, Brazil's *quilombos* built their own pageants and festivals atop these spiritual traditions, binding together communities in steel hoops of shared memory. Consider the satirical *bumba-meu-boi* (loosely, "shake it, ox"), celebrated in *quilombos* across northeastern Brazil. In the version celebrated by the *quilombo* of Soledade (Solitude) in the eastern state of Maranhão, villagers pay festive homage to the fable of Pai Francisco, a henpecked African slave whose pregnant wife hankers for a taste of ox tongue. Alas, the only nearby ox is the pride and joy of Francisco's brutal master. Worse still, Francisco has been entrusted with its care. Nonetheless, he leads the beast into the forest and puts his knife into it. Quickly apprehended, Francisco is threatened with death unless the ox can be resurrected. Dancers representing authorities from the local mayor to the national president haplessly struggle to bring the beast back to life, giving spectators a chance to hoot at their failures. Ultimately, native priests revive the animal with blasts of tobacco, perfumed waters, and the shaking of special rattles: the indigenous arsenal of cure. Crowds cheer as the ox staggers to its feet and exhort it to dance lively—*bumba, meu boi!* A cheerful mashup of America (tobacco, priests, and forest creatures) and Africa (cows, slaves), *bumba-meu-boi* is the tale of the *quilombo* itself: slaves escaping their fate with the help of Brazil's original inhabitants.

Five hundred miles southwest, the *quilombo* struggle for freedom is revisited even more overtly at the rite of *lambe-sujo* (an insulting reference to the red African cloth used for turbans—the equivalent, perhaps, of "towelhead"). Covering their entire bodies with a shimmering, tarry coat of charcoal and oil, *quilombo* dwellers in the state of Alagoas reenact their ancestors' lives in an annual pageant. The day begins with men and women playing run-

away slaves gathered in a protective circle around a king and queen—African nobility, like Aqualtune and Yanga. Some of the slaves suck on baby pacifiers, symbolizing the cruel circular plugs strapped into the mouths of recalcitrant slaves. Ominously lurking at the edges are *caboclinhos* (another pejorative term, perhaps translatable as "redskins")—Indian trackers who were agents of the Portuguese. Their bodies dyed red with plant oil, brilliantly colored feathers exploding from their heads, the trackers meet the Africans in their protected circle. After ritualized struggle, the *caboclinhos* win; as the *lambe-sujos* are dragged through the streets, they beseech bystanders for money in a final attempt to buy their freedom.

In these Afro-Indian communities, the context is head-spinning: people with African ancestors in what amounts to blackface, people with native ancestors who allied with Africans playing other natives who fought with them. Somehow stepping across the centuries, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Africans beg contemporary Brazilians for the means to attain liberty.

Constantly hunted by slavers, the escaped slaves and natives who coalesced into Brazil's *quilombos* naturally sought spiritual comfort—and found it in an extraordinary variety of religious observances that mixed African, Indian, and Christian elements. These limbs hang in the Room of Miracles in Salvador's Igreja de Bonfim, votive offerings given as thanks for miraculous cures in a church that is a holy place for both Catholicism and the Afro-Indian religion Candomblé.

Legally, Brazil's *quilombos* had had nothing to fear after the nation abolished slavery in 1888—nobody was going to return runaway slaves to captivity. But the end of slavery did not mean an end to discrimination, poverty, and anti-maroon violence. The nation's maroon communities continued to conceal themselves, staying so far out of official sight that by the middle of last century most Brazilians believed that *quilombos* no longer existed. In the 1960s, the generals who then ruled Brazil looked on their maps and observed to their displeasure that about 60 percent of the country was blank (actually, it was filled with Indians, peasant farmers, and *quilombos*, but the government dismissed them). To the generals' way of thinking, filling the emptiness was a matter of national security. In a breathtakingly ambitious program, they linked the brand-new, ultramodernist capital, Brasília, the western frontier, and the ports of the Amazon by slashing a network of highways across the interior.

In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of thousands of migrants from central and southern Brazil thronged up the highways, believing the generals' promises that they could begin new lives in new agricultural settlements. Instead, they encountered bad roads, poor land, and lawless violence: *Deadwood* with malaria. Many smallholders abandoned their farms soon after clearing them—few conventional annual crops would grow in Amazonia's aluminum-saturated soil. In the long run, the big ranches didn't do much better, even though many received subsidies from the military government. In the short run, they deemed all people found on their property to be squatters and removed them, often at gunpoint. In this way countless *quilombos* were expunged, their inhabitants scattered—Dona Rosario's family was probably among them.

The onslaught of ranches was greeted by worldwide protest. Chico Mendes, a kind of Brazilian Martin Luther King, led an international campaign to recognize the rights of the Amazon's inhabitants to their land. Meanwhile, the dictatorship's hold on power unraveled as Brazil plunged into economic crisis. The nation enacted a new, democratic constitution in October 1988. Two months later a rancher-paid hit man killed Mendes. But the assassination was too late to stop his cause. Among other things, the new constitution already declared that "quilombo communities" are "the legitimate owners of the lands they occupy, for which the State shall issue the respective title deeds."

"Nobody understood the implications of this," said Alberto Lorenço Pereira, undersecretary for sustainable development in the Brazilian ministry of long-term planning, which formulates the nation's land-use policy. When the new constitution was enacted, he told Hecht and me, its drafters imagined "a few remnant *quilombos* somewhere in the forest" whose elderly members would be rewarded with their fields. Now many researchers believe that as many as five thousand may survive in Brazil, most of them in the Amazon basin, occupying perhaps 30 million hectares—115,000 square miles, an area the size of Italy. Not only did the *quilombos* occupy an enormous territory, much of it spread out along riverbanks, which meant that they controlled access into a still-larger expanse in the interior. Conflict was inevitable, Pereira said. "A lot of people want that land."

I saw what he meant when I visited the *quilombo* of Mojú, four hours of bone-jarring muddy road from Belém, the city at the mouth of the Amazon. Its twelve linked settlements had been founded by runaways sometime in the late eighteenth century. It had existed in hiding for almost two hundred years, Manuel Almeida, head of the village *quilombo* association, told me. The end of slavery had brought no relief, Almeida said. The rubber tappers had come first, grabbing Mojú's rubber trees. Then came the timber companies, stripping the forest of mahogany and dyewood. Cattle ranches had seized land in the 1960s and 1970s—the properties, though little used, were still fenced off. A company punched through roads to a bauxite mine upstream. Two other firms that mine kaolin, a special white clay used in porcelain-making and paper-making, had jammed pipelines through the middle of the village. Now the bauxite firm—a subsidiary of Companhia Vale do Rio Doce, the biggest mining company in the Americas—wanted to put a pipeline for crushed bauxite through Mojú on the way to a big refinery west of Belém. All of this had occurred without permission or consultation, Almeida said. The government had granted the firms concessions that gave them the right to build these things because the *quilombo* had no legal existence.

Almeida was talking in his home, in a room that was bare except for a hammock and a crucifix on the wall. Now and then his wife and brother walked in and offered glasses of water. He said that he had heard that Brazilian companies were prospecting in the region for natural gas. He said that he had heard that American companies wanted to put in resorts at the mouth of the Amazon. He said that a man had come by with some papers that he said gave him the right to put in a farm for oil palms. He said that Mojú's twelve communities had existed for two centuries and that this ought to count for something.

THE VIEW FROM DONA ROSARIO'S FARM

Two years after relocating Mazagão from North Africa to the northern Amazon, the Portuguese feted their own bravery by honoring St. James, the

patron saint of Iberian anti-Muslim activities. For the colonists, isolated on the equator, it must have been an apprehensive time; according to Laurent Vidal, a historian at the University of La Rochelle who is the author of a study of Mazagão, the clergy, too, were gloomy, fearful that civilization itself was under assault. Perhaps that is why they jointly chose to honor a golden moment in Mazagão's history: the day, two centuries before, when the favor of St. James had allowed them to repel an attack by Sultan Abdallah al-Ghalib Billah, the powerful ruler of much of what is now Morocco. Something about the occasion took hold in the celebrants' imaginations—not just those of the colonists, but also their slaves. As the Portuguese left Vila Nova Mazagão, their slaves stepped in to take their places in the ritual. Decades after the last European had departed, its African and Indian inhabitants were still reenacting a faraway battle between Islam and Christendom. They still do today.

Over time, the celebration has grown ever more elaborate, ever more encrusted with ritual—and ever more disconnected from actual events. The battle that maroon descendants celebrate today is entirely different from the battle commemorated by the founders of Vila Nova Mazagão. Sultan Abdallah has vanished, replaced by a Muslim leader named, mysteriously, Caldeira (Boiler). When Caldeira's siege does not breach the walls of Mazagão, Caldeira tries a Trojan Horse–like ruse. Admitting the failure of his attack, he proposes rewarding the Christians' courage with a masked ball, at which he will serve platters of delicacies, a treat for hungry soldiers. In fact, the sultan plans to use the masked ball as a cover to persuade Portuguese soldiers to defect. Those who remain loyal will be given the sweets, which are poisoned. The Portuguese wisely suspect the gifts. They slip some of the food to Caldeira's horses, which expire promptly. At the ball, they give some to his men, killing them. Then they feed Caldeira, killing him. By morning, the dance floor is littered with corpses.

Enraged by his father's death, Caldeira's son Caldeirinha (Little Boiler) attacks the fort. The weary Christians are overwhelmed by the vengeful Muslims. To demoralize them further, Little Boiler orders his men to kidnap all the children in the city. Now enraged and vengeful themselves, the Christians counterattack. The tide of battle turns as the day draws to an end. Realizing that night will give the Muslims time to retreat and regroup, the Portuguese pray for more time. In the heavens, St. James hears their pleas. His holy fingers reach into the sky and stop the sun from setting. With the extra hours of daylight the Christians drive away Little Boiler's army, capturing him along the way.

An epidemic in 1915 forced many of Vila Nova Mazagão's people to move

the town again, to an area about an hour down the river. They called its third incarnation Mazagão Nova; the second one was changed to Mazagão Velho, Old Mazagão. Ultimately many of the maroons didn't like the new city, which was more accessible. They returned to Mazagão Velho. Again the festival proved to be a way of knitting together a community spread over dozens of rivers. It grew into a full-fledged theatrical reenactment, complete with a delivery of "poisoned" sweets, an all-male masked ball, a "stoning" of a Muslim spy with tomatoes and oranges, an "abduction" of children, and a stylized battle on horseback in orange and green costumes.

I took a boat one morning to visit Mazagão Velho. The rivers were crowded with vessels taking children to school—one of them held an entire soccer team, exuberant in handmade uniforms. The town was getting ready for the festival. Somebody was testing the loudspeakers on the main church with carimbó, the dance music of the lower Amazon. Children ran from the boats to their classrooms under displays of flags and bunting.

The laughter belied a division in the town. Newcomers, we were told, were trying to make the festival into a tourist attraction. They were throwing out the old costumes and masks and bringing in new ones with more international appeal. The old costumes had been hidden away. A woman named Joseane Jacarandá showed me the old costumes in a back room lined with flags bearing Christian crosses and Muslim scimitars. Her grandson strutted around the living room with a gigantic bishop's hat. Jacarandá's eyes glittered with angry tears. For more than two centuries the maroons had been left largely alone. Now the world was coming in and wrecking something she held dear.

Dona Rosario had entirely different feelings about coming out of the shadows. Three years before my visit, men had laid electric wire along Igarapé Espinel. I had seen it on the boat to her home, a thin, fragile link, draped from tree to tree along the water. The power had allowed her to buy a cell-phone charger—which is to say, she now had a telephone. If somebody in her family was hurt or sick, she could call for help. For people who have always lived a phone call away from an ambulance or police car, the magnitude of this change is difficult to grasp. As is the magnitude of the change represented by her second big purchase: a chest freezer. Until buying the freezer, she had always had to sell açai immediately after harvest, to avoid spoilage—she couldn't wait for a better deal. Without a phone, she couldn't call around to find the best price. Knowing her circumstances, buyers had always offered her the worst terms—she couldn't walk away from the deal. Now she could process the fruit into pulp and stick it in the freezer until she was ready to sell. Açai had become faddishly popular in the United States and