

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Timothy James Lockley, ed.** *Maroon Communities in South Carolina: A Documentary Record*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009. xxiii + 142 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-776-4; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57003-777-1.



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Timothy James Lockley's documentary history represents a valuable contribution to the study of maroons and fugitive slaves in the Americas. There have been several quality studies of maroon communities by other scholars, but Lockley is the first to thoroughly consider marronage as it developed in South Carolina. He presents his documents and commentary in a way that offers students, teachers, and other academics an understanding of the nature of Carolina maroon communities and how they differed from similar communities formed elsewhere in the Americas, such as Brazil, Jamaica, Louisiana, and the Great Dismal swamp of Virginia and North Carolina.

Lockley first considers these other maroon societies and the origins of marronage in the New World in a detailed introduction. The term "maroon" is first applied to escaped slaves in the late sixteenth century as a corruption of the Spanish word *cimaron*, meaning "wild, not tame." Lockley rightly distinguishes between the vast majority of enslaved runaways and those considered maroons. Most bondsmen either left their place of enslavement for only a brief period, or were recaptured or returned of their own volition within a few days or weeks. Most had no intentions of establishing themselves as parts of an isolated fugitive community. Ma-

roons, in contrast, never planned to return to their enslavement. They consciously set out to form independent, self-sustaining communities outside of the control of Euro-American authorities.

Wherever slavery gained a foothold in the Americas, marronage soon followed. The Spanish first introduced captive Africans to the New World, and as early as the 1540s, sizeable maroon colonies appear in the historical record in Cuba and Santo Domingo. Sir Francis Drake also famously encountered Panamanian maroons in his expeditions of the 1570s. These settlements were often hard for Spanish authorities to find and even harder for their military forces to completely disband. Often, authorities were forced to confirm the maroons' ostensible freedom in exchange for the guarantee that the communities would discourage other runaways from reaching their locations and returning any slaves that may later flee to them. This was also often the case with maroons in the Dutch colony of Surinam as well as the largest fugitive communities in Jamaica. As a result, some remote communities survived in relatively unmolested isolation for generations. Maroon communities in Portuguese Brazil, called *quilombos*, were often small and quite similar to those occurring in Spanish America with the exception of the kingdom of Palmares, the

largest and most persistent maroon colony in the Americas. The small size of the islands and nature of the terrain in most French colonies often meant that maroons, though present, posed few threats to the peace and stability of the islands. The same was usually the result in North America, though the relatively small incidence of marronage there owed more to the overwhelming military power of the U.S. authorities than landscape or demographics.

Before taking a close look at marronage in South Carolina, Lockley offers several factors that he believes were necessary for escaped slaves to form a successful maroon community in the Americas. First, he argues that escaping slaves needed to live in close proximity to areas that were relatively inaccessible to the military: swamps, jungles, forests, or mountains. Second, the community had to be defensible by a limited number of armed maroons, with few access points and possible disguised trailheads to prevent detection. Third, maroons in a community had to be sufficiently numerous to sustain themselves. Fourth, successful and long-lived communities required sufficient territory to grow crops to supplement hunting. Fifth, maroons needed some access to nearby plantation societies in order to trade, especially for weapons. Lastly, Lockley argues that to achieve any real degree of security, maroon communities had to avoid posing a serious threat to the dominant society. This was most often achieved by coming to some sort of accommodation with white society, be that a peace treaty or something as simple as attempting to completely separate themselves from colonial regimes.

In the documentary analysis that follows, Lockley places South Carolina's maroon past into the context of these other New World slave societies. It was South Carolina, he argues, that was the society most sharply defined by slavery, and within two generations of its first permanent settlement in 1670, became a place where white settlers were outnumbered by blacks. Moreover, relative to other slave societies in North America, more of South Carolina's slave population was African, and they became creolized more slowly. The combined effect of so little white supervision of the state's slave population and such a large proportion of African-born slaves was highly conducive of marronage. Indeed, Lockley characterizes early South Carolina as perhaps more appropriately considered as a part of the West Indies than part of the North American mainland.

Early marronage in South Carolina ranged in degree from highly mobile settlements of less than a dozen fugi-

tives to larger groups of up to one hundred fully settled maroons who engaged in agriculture and built substantial structures and defensive palisades. The varying physical sizes of maroon colonies did not only depend on the number of resident fugitive slaves, though that factor was important, but also depended on the size and location of the swamp refuges most favored by Carolina maroons. Swamps in the midst of plantations may have offered the nearest refuge, but they were also the most likely to draw the attention of whites. Areas further from the plantation heartlands were less likely to be discovered, and were thus more likely to draw fugitives and survive unmolested much longer, partly because fresh runaways were drawn to a successful alternative to plantation life. Accordingly, the longer a maroon colony existed, the larger it grew.

Lockley dates the existence of marronage in South Carolina to the early eighteenth century. He presents documents to suggest that slaves during the mid-1700s became emboldened by the lack of unified authority among colonial whites and escaped to form their own communities. After the Revolutionary War arrived in the Lowcountry, many slaves allied against the Patriot forces when the opportunity presented itself, and after the war, many of these wartime partisans settled together in Carolina swamps rather than return to bondage in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of the British. Following a nearly thirty-year period with little evidence of significant maroon activity, incidences of marronage grew markedly through the early 1820s before gradually fading away in the early years of the antebellum period.

*Maroon Communities in South Carolina* offers a valuable glimpse into the liminal territory between freedom and slavery represented by maroons and their communities. Lockley's thoughtfully chosen documents capture the essence of marronage in South Carolina from 1711 through the 1820s, and his insightful commentary is supported by the best and most recent secondary scholarship. Only a few limitations merit brief mention. The scope of Lockley's study could have been expanded back over a century into the 1500s and then decades forward through the Civil War. With regard to the former, Lockley does not mention the first documented slave rebellion and mass escape that occurred within the bounds of what would eventually become South Carolina in 1526. In addition, there is more than enough documentation of marronage in the antebellum decades to warrant an additional chapter to address the latter. More understandable is the lack of an authentic maroon voice in the work. The reader yearns for more direct insight into maroon

life through fugitive eyes rather than accounts of it from outside, usually white, perspectives. Of course, this is more a shortcoming of the sources than the scholar. Indeed, Lockley should be congratulated and thanked for unearthing and gathering together the documentary evidence of groups of people whose principal concern in life was to remain invisible to the world.

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