

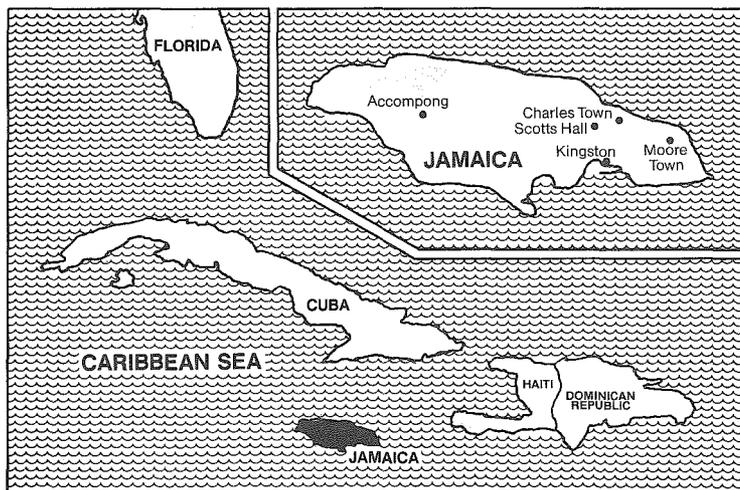
JAMAICA



According to the official written history of Jamaica, the indigenous people of the land, the Arawaks, were exterminated by the Spanish prior to the British takeover of Jamaica in 1655. However, the Jamaican Maroons, free blacks who waged guerrilla war against the British, claim otherwise. Roy Nigerian Harris, leader of the Young Maroons of Jamaica, states, "Most of them died, but the remainder were living in the Maroons communities with the Spaniards who fled to the hills. Three groups of people, the Maroons, the Spaniards, and the Arawaks defended the island against the English. But because the English promised the Maroons peace, they stopped fighting. The Spaniards fled because they could not fight without the Maroons. The Arawaks lived with the Maroons all the time. They cross-bred with the Maroons but the African blood stands out."

Today, there are four major Maroons communities in Jamaica, born of treaties completed with the British in 1739. The treaties recognized Maroon freedom, their right to the land, and Maroon self-government. Accompong is one of the original villages located in the rugged western Cockpit Country; and Moore Town, Charles Town and Scotts Hall were originally settled by the Windward Maroons. Only Accompong and Moore Town, however, maintain a way of life based on the original treaties, such as communal land tenure, exemption from government taxation, and governing Maroon councils headed by elected officers. Still, Maroons throughout Jamaica rely on traditional medicine and practice a clearly distinct tradition of music and dance, which contain African and Arawak influences.

Despite their proud history of freedom and resistance, the Maroons are a forgotten people in Jamaica. According to Nigerian, "Government does not share whatever happens in Jamaica with the Maroons. Musicians sing, but not about the Maroons. They teach, but not about the Maroons. The Maroons have no hospitals. We have the highest malnutrition rate in the country. We have serious cases of gastroenteritis. We cannot transport our sick for we have no roads. We can't afford meals. We are starving. There is no community activity for the youths. The children are harshly brought up with the whip and harsh words because of the



pressure that have burdened the people. It is discouraging." Continual attempts are made to rob the Maroons of their commonly-held lands through private purchases, and to undermine their independence by withholding public services, the same techniques that have been used to eradicate indigenous land tenure and indigenous peoples around the world.

Still, Nigerian says, "Sometimes we cannot blame strangers for all the bad things that befall us—we must also

blame ourselves and our own Maroons leaders. We would like to collaborate with everyone and make this world a better place, but first we have to help ourselves by getting rid of the rifts in our communities.” To begin this process, the Maroons have formed a new federation to create a stronger representation and voice for the people. Nigerian concludes, “We have a legacy here in Jamaica that we can afford to extend to all the peoples of the Caribbean, and this legacy lies within the realm of the Maroons. It is in the history of the people and their will and determination to fight against evil and overwhelming powers. Our history, if told correctly, can be of benefit in many ways. It would surprise many.”

—Randi Kristensen

SAIIC has also received a letter from Roy Nigerian Harris with the following comments:

“I am the vice-president of the newly form Maroons Federation of Jamaica. We would like to Federate with you as we share the same problems. We could open a communication connection and rise everyone to the occasion. I myself have been much concerned about the Indians of the Americas. Let us join hands for the Federation of Man.

For more information regarding the situation of the Maroons, the new Federation, or the Maroons Cultural Centre, contact Roy Nigerian Harris, 12 Harbor Street, Port Antonio, Portland, Jamaica, W.I., or Randi Kristensen, 1727 Delaware Street, Berkeley, CA 94703.

GUATEMALA

The government’s assault on guerrilla groups in rural areas of Guatemala has involved the destruction of many Indian villages and the deaths of many Indian people. Others have fled across the border to Mexico to protect their lives. Nilo Cayuqueo recently asked Domingo Lopez of the Indian Movement of Guatemala, who is among the refugees in Mexico, about the situation in the refugee camps:

“It is a very difficult situation, but we have to recognize that the very fact that we are now in Mexico is a gesture of support by the Mexican government. Otherwise, we know that there would be no other place for us to be. Actually, even though there are many limitations, we know that the refugees are struggling to survive in all aspects of life. We are trying to survive, and we have the hope that we might some day return to our country, but that will only be when we know there are genuine changes.”

Jeronimo Camposeco of the Corn Maya project in Florida comments on what can be done to assist Guatemalan refugees in the United States:

“One important step is working to build a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood on the part of Indians in the United States toward Guatemalan refugees now living here.”

Another Guatemalan Indian voice is that of Pedro Ixcoy:

“We continue our traditional religious practice, even though we are persecuted and killed for it. It is seen by the government as very subversive. There can be a unity of understanding among Indians of all the Americas from our knowledge of the religious basis of life.”

The newly-elected civilian government in Guatemala brings hope for change. SAIIC strongly supports a move toward peace and social justice.



Guatemala News and Information Bureau, 1982.