

Famous Black Britons: Nanny of the Maroons (c. 1686 - c.1750)

Jamaica

Jamaica is an island in the Caribbean Sea. Originally inhabited by the indigenous Taíno peoples the island came under Spanish rule in 1494. The Spanish called the island Santiago. Many of the indigenous people were killed or died of diseases, after which the Spanish brought large numbers of Africans to the island to work as enslaved labourers. The island remained a possession of Spain until 1655, when England (later Great Britain) invaded the island, took control and renamed it Jamaica. Under British colonial rule Jamaica became a leading sugar exporter, with a plantation economy dependent on the enforced labour of enslaved Africans and their descendants. Resistance to enslavement led to uprisings, rebellions and the establishment of independent Maroon communities by Africans who refused to work on the plantations. All enslaved Africans were emancipated (freed) in 1838.

Maroon

Africans who, having survived the journey from Africa to the Caribbean, refused to be enslaved and escaped European control to form self-governed communities for themselves and their descendants. Maroon communities were established in the Caribbean (Jamaica, Haiti, Suriname, Cuba, Puerto Rico, St. Vincent) and throughout the Americas (Brazil, Guyana, Dominica, Panama, Colombia, Mexico and from the Amazon River Basin to the southern United States, primarily Florida and the Carolinas). Most Africans did not refer to themselves as Maroons. Instead, they referred to themselves by names such as Nyankipong Pickibu, which means 'Children of the Almighty' in the West African language Twi. Jamaican Maroons used names such as Koromanti, Kromanti or Yungkungung to indicate their culture and history.

Maroon wars

The First Maroon War was a conflict between the Jamaican Maroons and the colonial British authorities that started around 1728 and continued until the peace treaties of 1739 and 1740. It was led by self-liberated Africans who set up communities in the mountains who fought the British colonial Government of Jamaica for their freedom. The Second Maroon War of 1795–1796 was an eight-month conflict between the Maroons of Cudjoe's Town (Trelawny Town), a Maroon settlement later re-named after Governor Edward Trelawny at the end of First Maroon War, located near Trelawny Parish, Jamaica in the St James Parish, and the British colonials who controlled the island. The Windward communities of Jamaican Maroons remained neutral during this rebellion and their treaty with the British still remains in force. Accompong Town, however, sided with the colonial militias, and fought against Trelawny Town.

International events

In 1707, the Act of Union merges England and Scotland as 'one kingdom by the name of Great Britain', 104 years after the union of the crowns under James I (James VI of Scotland).

From 1739, Britain attacks Spanish possessions in Central America, a conflict subsumed from 1742 by the War of the Austrian Succession, which involved most of the powers of Europe until 1748.

Monarchs

James II (1685-1688)

Mary II and William III (r. 1689-1702)

Anne (r. 1702-1714)

George I (r. 1714 -1727)

George II (r. 1727-1760)

African diaspora

By 1700 the British slave trade was fully established, forcibly transporting black Africans, mainly from West Africa, to the British colonies of the West Indies and North America. Trading ships set sail from Europe carrying manufactured goods to the west coast of Africa where the goods were traded for captured people. Once full, the ships would depart for the Americas or the Caribbean. Conditions were squalid and many people did not survive the voyage. The final stage of the transatlantic trade route saw the ships return to Europe with sugar, rum, tobacco and other luxury items. By the 1790s, it is estimated that 480,000 people were enslaved in the British Colonies. In the process huge fortunes were made traders and plantation owners. The 1688 novel *Oroonoko* by Aphra Behn (English playwright, poet and author) made an early protest against the inhumanity of the African slave trade which was not abolished in the British Empire until 1807; although slavery itself continued in British colonies until 1838.

Notes on historical background

All information assembled by the Schools and Young Audiences Team at the British Museum. The brief historical background above has been written using a range of published sources (print and online) and further information on the period is available in other sources (for example printed, online, lectures).

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