Maria Alessandra Bollettino
Professor of History, Framingham State University
Association of Caribbean Historians, May 2026

"Black Sons of Hydra": The Imperial Legacies of the 1730s First Maroon War in Jamaica

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In 1746, the anonymous author of *An Essay concerning Slavery, and the Danger Jamaica Is expos'd to from the Too great Number of Slaves* warned that, if drastic measures were not immediately taken, Britain would soon lose control of its most lucrative colony, spelling ruin for the empire in the Caribbean. Writing only a few years after the accommodation with the island's Maroons, free descendants of escaped slaves who lived in independent communities in the highlands, and near the close of an Anglo-Spanish war that had exposed Jamaica to the depredations of privateers and the threat of wholesale invasion, the author could rest assured that his admonitions would not be dismissed as hyperbolic. He decried the defenseless state of the island, which he described as "so insecure, that the Inhabitants are not only alarm'd by every trifling Armament of the Enemy, but under the greatest Apprehensions frequently from their own Slaves" and declared Jamaica's vulnerability to attacks from both without and within "a Matter of publick Concern."[1] Attributing Jamaica's insecurity to its enslaved Black majority, he exhorted Parliament to bypass its planters, who had proven incapable of regulating themselves, and pass legislation to ban the further importation of slaves into Jamaica and to better discipline and exploit the enslaved who already inhabited the island.[2]

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[1] *An Essay concerning Slavery, and the Danger Jamaica Is expos'd to from the Too great Number of Slaves, And the Too little Care that is taken to manage Them, And a Proposal to prevent the further Importation of Negroes into that Island* (London, 1746), ii. The pamphlet's authorship has been attributed to British Army officer Edward Trelawny, Governor of Jamaica from 1738 to 1752. On the importance of *An Essay Concerning Slavery*'s West Indian provenance, see James Robertson, "An Essay Concerning Slavery: A Mid-Eighteenth Century Analysis from Jamaica," *Slavery & Abolition*, 33:1 (2012): 65-85.
[2] *Essay concerning Slavery*, iii-viii.

The author proposed that the same Black men who presently threatened to wrench Jamaica from Britain's grasp could, if given the right incentives, be depended upon to serve both as steadfast defenders of Jamaica and as stalwart assailants of the French and Spanish in the Caribbean. In crafting his argument, he drew explicit lessons from the actions of Black rebels in Jamaica's First Maroon War of the 1730s.[3] He maintained that enslaved people would rebel whenever they saw an opportunity to recover their liberty and that only an augmented free population would be able to keep the enslaved majority in submission. Recognizing that "white Men enough cannot, at least immediately be got," he recommended that skilled and head slaves be freed and given land in order to align their interests with those of slaveholders.[4] By relegating all enslaved people to field work and creating a third caste of free Black tradesmen and landowners, Britain would be "'sowing Hydra's Teeth, from which arm'd Men should rise up for the Service of the Kingdom.'"[5] These regimented "black Sons of Hydra" would serve as an effective defensive force against enslaved rebels, to whom they would have no allegiance, as well as against foreign invaders, from whom they would need to safeguard their liberty as well as their land.[6] Such a disciplined cadre of free Black soldiers would enable British regulars and navy seamen, who presently were forced to guard Jamaica, to undertake more decisive engagements elsewhere. Instead of being dependent upon the mother country for its defense, Jamaica would be in a position to furnish detachments from its free Black corps for offensive

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[3] *Essay concerning Slavery*, iv, 56, viii-ix, 49. On the Jamaican Maroons, see Kenneth Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Mavis Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal* (Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1988); Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 61-96, 211-23; Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2006); and Philip Wright, "War and Peace with the Maroons, 1730-1739," *Caribbean Quarterly* 16 (1970): 5-27.

[4] *Essay concerning Slavery*, iv.

[5] *Essay concerning Slavery*, 55. The author was referring to the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts, in which Jason battles an army of men sown from the teeth of the Hydra to obtain the Golden Fleece.

[6] *Essay concerning Slavery*, 56.

expeditions.[7] In emancipating elite slaves, Jamaica would convert its natural enemies into allies, thereby transforming itself from an encumbrance to an asset to the British Empire in times of war.

The author of *An Essay concerning Slavery* would have known of the constitutive imperial roles that men of African and indigenous descent played in England's far-flung tropical colonies. Non-Europeans constructed and made profitable as coerced laborers England's seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century colonies in West Africa and the East and West Indies. Prey to insurrection, foreign invasion, and a perilous disease environment and inhabited by non-European majorities, fledgling English colonies throughout the "torrid zone" depended upon non-Europeans not only for their profitability, but also their security.[8] In the 1680s and 1690s, Barbados and Nevis passed regulations allowing for the arming of enslaved men in moments of crisis, and Jamaicans "Drew from all parts of the Island as many able Negroes, as Could be

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[7] *Essay concerning Slavery*, viii-ix, 49. Lacking the white manpower to guard against foreign invasion or slave insurrection, Caribbean slave societies depended heavily upon the regiments of regular soldiers and fleets of naval warships sent to augment their defenses. Residents of the West Indies often refused to contribute White manpower to offensive expeditions, as they feared depleting their already inadequate White populations. Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies*, 203-6, 221-22, 227-40. David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 122-24. On the British Caribbean's military dependence in the late eighteenth century, see Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 34-57 and O'Shaughnessy, "Recoats and Slaves in the British Caribbean," in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 105-27.

[8] Justin Roberts, *Fragile Empire: Slavery in the Early English Tropics, 1645-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), 239-80. Roberts' work offers a chronological corrective to scholarship that contends that the wake of the Seven Years' War ushered in a transformation in thinking and practice concerning the martial roles non-Europeans could play in the British Empire. Philip D. Morgan and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy characterize the American Revolution as a time of "radical changes" and a "decisive turning point in the arming of slaves in the Americas." Philip D. Morgan and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, "Arming Slaves in the American Revolution," in *Arming Slaves from Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 182. Sylvia Frey maintains, "The use of slave labor in a military capacity was also common among European powers since the seventeenth century, particularly in the Caribbean and Brazil, where shortages of manpower forced colonial nations to recruit slaves for various military functions. The dangerous expedient of arming slaves was, however, generally eschewed until 1795, when the problem of West Indian defense forced the British to organize black companies." Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 70.

Trusted and Put them in Armes" to defend against French incursions during the Nine Years' War.[9] The Royal African Company relied upon West African soldiers and enslaved soldiers to preserve their coastal forts and factories while in Sumatra, the East India Company deployed local Malays, imported Bugis mercenaries, and enslaved soldiers, eventually turning to Indian sepoys in the eighteenth century.[10] Early-eighteenth-century British imperial strategists in London and the West Indies looking to consolidate control over the empire's holdings would have been aware of and willing to build upon the decentralized efforts of past and present colonial agents to strengthen tropical colonies.

Just as they had impressed the author of *An Essay concerning Slavery*, past precedent together with Black men's actions during the 1730s Maroon Wars convinced some British officials that a select few Black men could be transformed from a source of vulnerability as slaves to the key to the British Empire's strength in the Caribbean as free subjects.[11] Those Jamaicans who proposed the liberation of a cadre of enslaved men as a means of ensuring Britain's holdings in the West Indies had good reason to believe that their schemes would prove both acceptable and, if implemented, effective. After all, their proposals echoed an experiment

[9] Henry Barham, "The Civil History of Jamaica to the Year 1722," Add. Ms. 12422, p. 201, British Library, quoted in Roberts, *Fragile Empire*, 256.
[10] Roberts, *Fragile Empire*, 261-77.
[11] On the influence of enslaved West Indians upon British antislavery, see especially Christopher Leslie Brown, "From Slaves to Subjects: Envisioning an Empire without Slavery, 1772-1834," in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 132-39 and Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006). See also Michael Craton, "Emancipation from Below? The Role of the British West Indies Slaves in the Emancipation Movement, 1816-1834," in *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*, ed. Jack Hayward (London: Cass, 1985), 110-31; Craton, *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997), 263-323; Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 254-321; Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 197-208. For a work that explicitly takes into account the influence of war, insecurity, and slave revolt upon British antislavery, see Claudius Fergus, "War, Revolution and Abolitionism, 1793-1806," in *Capitalism and Antislavery Fifty Years Later: Eric Eustace Williams – A Reassessment of the Man and his Work*, ed. Heather Cateau and S.H.H. Carrington (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 173-95.

that was enthusiastically endorsed by Britons in London and Jamaica alike: the 1739 settlement with the island's Leeward and Windward Maroons.

In persuading British officials of the martial adeptness of Black men, Jamaica's First Maroon War played an integral role in laying the groundwork for Britain's deployment of Black soldiers to defend and extend its empire throughout the eighteenth century. As recipients of regular missives from Jamaica, British officials in London were well aware of the martial prowess of the formerly enslaved people and their descendants who lived in independent communities in the island's interior and the fact that parties of British regulars, Royal Navy seamen, White and Black Jamaican militiamen, and enslaved Black men proved unable to subjugate them. Colonial officials' reports of the 1730s and beyond underscored the agility, alacrity, and cunning of the Maroons and convinced metropolitan officials that they – and Black warriors in general – were better suited than European troops to wage war in the West Indies. The Maroons proved themselves a formidable foe during their decade-long conflict with the island's British inhabitants that impeded and indeed imperiled British settlement in Jamaica. The Maroons' raids on plantations, cattle pens, breastworks, and barracks intimidated soldiers, compelled residents to abandon their estates, incited enslaved people to escape their owners, and diminished productivity and trade. Despite laying out vast sums of money to carve roads and erect barracks in the mountainous and forested interior of the island and to send company after company of soldiers to assail the Maroons, Jamaica's colonists failed to vanquish them. Throughout the 1730s, Jamaican officials bemoaned the defenseless state of the island and warned metropolitan officials that Britain's tenure on the island would likely be brief. Jamaica's colonists' concern that the Maroons might ally with the Spanish served to intensify their trepidation that their hold on Jamaica was imperiled. An inhabitant of the island declared to

Secretary of State Newcastle in 1733 that "ye Rebel Negros are sayd to keep constant correspondence with ye Spaniards at Cuba" and reasoned that with the aid of the Maroons and the enslaved, the Spanish "would have a fair chance to succeed" in any attempt they might make to wrest Jamaica from Britain's control.[12] Facing mounting hostilities with Spain, Jamaican officials endeavored to be the first Europeans to solidify an alliance with the Maroons; the island's British inhabitants greeted the 1739 treaties with Jamaica's two main bands of Maroons, in which they agreed to defend the island against both enslaved rebels and foreign invaders, with palpable relief.

Their experience combatting and then allying with the Maroons shaped early eighteenth-century officials' views of Black men and the contributions they could be expected to make to the British Empire. The experience of the Maroon War convinced many Jamaican colonists that men of African descent outperformed men of European descent in the art of bush fighting. Commentators seemed unclear concerning the provenance of the Maroons' aptitude, but were certain that Jamaica's White soldiers lacked it. Writing in the early 1740s, Jamaican merchant and historian James Knight described the Maroons as "many hundred Stout, able Negroes being born in the Woods, who were trained to Arms, and being from their Infancy Accustomed to Steep Rocky Mountains." In this, he seemed to attribute the Maroons' evident agility and expertise at least in part to their upbringing. But in emphasizing that that were "Stout, able Negroes" and in adding that "it was exceeding difficult, and almost impracticable for white Persons to follow them," he also evinced contemporary beliefs that people of African descent

[12] J. Teledor to Newcastle, April 27, 1733, CO 137/54, ff. 368-71, TNA. For additional expressions of concern over the possibility of a Maroon-Spanish alliance, see The Merchants of Jamaica to the Board of Trade, February 20, 1733, CO 137/21, f. 7, The National Archives, Kew, England (hereafter TNA); J. Teledor to Newcastle, April 27, 1733, CO 137/54, ff. 368-71, TNA; and Gregory to Newcastle, November 17, 1737, CO 137/56, ff. 67-68, TNA.

were better suited to labor in tropical climates than those of European descent.[13] This conviction led some Jamaican officials to conclude that only Black men could be expected to combat other Black men effectively in the West Indies. In 1737, President of the Jamaica Council and Acting Governor John Gregory declared that the island needed soldiers who could "Range in the Woods," but maintained that "the Soldiers are not fit for that Service, and none but Negroes can bear those Fatigues in this Country."[14] The experience of failing to suppress such agile, competent, and resolute Black adversaries as the Maroons persuaded many Jamaican colonists – and the metropolitan officials with whom they communicated – that the Empire needed to determine how better to deploy men of African descent as soldiers.

Negotiating the 1739 settlements with the Maroons, in the words of Jamaica's Council, transformed their "mortal Enemies" into "Friends and Assistants."[15] In the wake of the treaties, Jamaica's officials began immediately to rely upon them to defend the island against its remaining threats. Nevertheless, some remained wary lest their new allies betray them. Governor Edward Trelawny described the Maroons as "a great addition of strength, & the most useful people we can have in going after any slaves that may rise in rebellion hereafter" but also suggested that it would be wise "not so entirely to trust our agreement with them as not to be upon our guard against any treachery."[16] Historian James Knight offered extensive evidence of the Maroons' adherence to the terms of the treaties and noted with evident relief that they "seem not only Contented but pleased with their present Circumstances."[17] Nevertheless, he advised that the colonists keep a "Strict Eye over them." He counseled that fraternization between the

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[13] James Knight, "The Naturall, Morall and Politicall History of Jamaica and the Territories thereon depending; from the Earliest Account of time to the year 1742," v. 1, Add. Mss. 12415, f. 191, British Library, London, England (hereafter BL).
[14] Acting Governor John Gregory to the Board of Trade, May 26, 1737, CO 137/22, ff. 132-133,TNA.
[15] Address of the Council to Trelawny, March 14, 1738/39, CO 13756, ff. 215-216, TNA.
[16] Governor Edward Trelawny to Newcastle, June 30, 1739, CO 137/56, ff. 236-237, TNA.
[17] Knight, "The Naturall, Morall and Politicall History of Jamaica," v. 1, Add. Mss. 12415, f. 49, BL.

Maroons and the enslaved should be prevented, the Maroons should not be allowed to stockpile arms, and steps should be taken to "induce them and their Posterity to incorporate and mix with the other inhabitants." Only by limiting their independence, he maintained, would it be possible to "render them usefull upon all occations."[18] Though Jamaica's officials welcomed the accord with the Maroons and sought to take advantage of it, they were careful to limit martial service as a means to power for men of African descent—a path offered by the Spanish that the British noted and purposefully attempted to avoid.[19] Island officials worked over the course of the eighteenth century to erode the status and rights that the 1739 treaties afforded the Maroons.[20] At the same time, they penned proposals and enacted protocols designed to make more effective use of the island's free and enslaved soldiers of African descent whom they believed they could trust and command more completely to secure Jamaica.

Jamaica's officials had gone to great lengths to staff ad hoc parties composed of free Black militiamen and enslaved men to pursue the Maroons throughout the 1730s. The parties' exorbitant expense and lack of success convinced many colonial officials that regulations needed to be introduced and inducements needed to be offered to both free and enslaved Black men to make more efficient use of them as a martial resource. President of the Council Gregory suggested to the Assembly in 1735 that "it would be of Singular Advantage to us, if the Mulattoes and Free Negroes could be made more serviceable." He expressed himself "persuaded

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[18] Knight, "The Naturall, Morall and Politicall History of Jamaica," v. 1, Add. Mss. 12415, f. 52, BL.
[19] On Spanish soldiers of African descent, see, for instance, Herbert S. Klein, "The Free Colored Militia of Cuba, 1568-1868," *Caribbean Studies* 6 (1966): 17-27; Allan J. Kuethe, "The Status of the Free Pardo in the Disciplined Militia of New Granada," *Journal of Negro History* 56 (April 1971): 105-17; Jane Landers, "Transforming Bondsmen into Vassals: Arming Slaves in Colonial Spanish America," in *Arming Slaves from Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Brown and Morgan; Ben Vinson, "Articulating Space: The Free-Colored Military Establishment in Colonial Mexico from the Conquest to Independence," *Callaloo* 27 (2004): 150-71; Ben Vinson, *Bearing Arms for his Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, 2001); and Ben Vinson, "Race and Badge: Free-Colored Soldiers in the Colonial Mexican Militia," *The Americas* 56 (April 2000): 471-96.
[20] Campbell, *Maroons of Jamaica*, 175-90.

they are the fittest for the Woods," and advised, "they might be encouraged to do their Duty, if they were put under some proper Establishment, formed into Companies, and allowed a moderate and regular Pay."[21] In 1738, the Assembly acted upon Gregory's recommendation with the passage of "An Act for rendering the Free Negroes and Mulattoes and Indians more useful and forming some of them into Companys, with proper Encouragements to pursue and Destroy the Rebellious Negroes."[22]

Disappointed in the performance of those enslaved men whom planters and political officials armed to combat the Maroons, island officials proposed new measures to increase their effectiveness as well. To counterbalance the allure of freedom that had prompted some enslaved recruits to join the Maroons, Gregory recommended to Secretary of State Thomas Pelham Holles, Duke of Newcastle in 1736 that Britain fund the liberation of 200 enslaved men to serve as the loyal, disciplined Black soldiers Jamaica so desperately needed. He expressed his conviction that the destruction of the Maroons "must be done by their own Colour If we could safely trust such a body together with Arms" and suggested that the Crown "Assist us with Money as to purchase the Freedom of Two hundred Slaves, such as we should Judge could be best depended upon, and put them under a British Establishment."[23] This body of freedmen, Gregory reasoned, would address several of Jamaica's problems at once. Offering enslaved men freedom would ensure their gratitude and enduring fidelity to the colony. Regimenting and training them would guarantee that they would be an effective, disciplined fighting force. Importantly, these soldiers would be more effectively under the control of Jamaica's colonial

[21] Speech of the President to the Council and Assembly, March 9, 1735, CO 137/22, ff. 72-75, TNA. See also Gregory to the Board of Trade, November 21, 1735, CO 137/22, 37-38, TNA.
[22] Mr. Francis Fane's Report upon Eight Acts Pass'd at Jamaica in 1738, CO 137/24, ff. 40-41, TNA.
[23] Gregory to Secretary of State Thomas Pelham Holles, Duke of Newcastle, November 23, 1736, CO 137/22, ff. 99-100, TNA.

government than either British regulars or militiamen. Jamaica's officials would not have to continually petition for them or suffer them to be recalled from the island, as was the case with regular soldiers. Officials would not have to resort to offering them exorbitant bounties or enacting martial law to ascertain their service, as they had to do to gain militiamen. Officials could select able, vigorous men rather than be forced to accept whichever enslaved men slaveholders chose to contribute to the public good – men whom officials suspected were "the worst of their People."[24] Given the service that might be expected of them, liberating a body of enslaved men to serve the island as a defensive force seemed to Gregory a worthy investment.

Imperial officials did not pursue Gregory's 1736 proposal that enslaved men be freed to safeguard Jamaica from its internal and external enemies. Still, the experience of the Maroon War convinced some British officials not only that Black men could and should be employed to defend existing colonies, but that they might be called upon to conquer new territories on behalf of the British Empire. In 1739, Lieutenant Francis Sadler reported to Governor Edward Trelawny that in return for respect for their freedom and land, the Leeward Maroons had "of their own accord offered to be assisting on the first command against the Spaniards or any other foreign Enemy."[25] Britain's 1740 assault upon Spanish Cartagena involved four companies of armed enslaved soldiers from Jamaica—413 enslaved men in total— and a single company of 28 Maroons led by a Black sergeant named Quao.[26] Commander in chief of the land forces General

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[24] John Ayscough to Newcastle, December 6, 1734, CO 137/55, ff. 131-132, TNA.
[25] Copy of Lieutenant Sadler's Letter to Mr. Trelawny, February 18, 1738/39, CO 137/56, ff. 199-200, TNA.
[26] On the enslaved and free Black soldiers, see A Return of the Officers, Serjeants, and Negro Slaves sent by the Governour of Jamaica to serve on the present Expedition, 31 March 1741, CO 5/42, f. 11, TNA. They served alongside 6,000 British regular troops and 5,000 recruits from North America. On the British regulars, see Newcastle to Trelawny, 18 April 1740, CO 137/56, ff. 309-12, TNA. On the North American recruits, see Cathcart to Newcastle, 30 Sept. 1740, CO 5/41, ff. 172-3, TNA. On the sieges of Cartagena and Cuba, see Albert Harkness, Jr. "Americanism and Jenkins' War," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 37, no. 1 (June 1950): 61-90; Douglas Edward Leach, "The Cartagena Expedition, 1740-1742, and Anglo-American Relations," in *Adapting to Conditions: War and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Maarten Ultee (University of Alabama Press, 1986), 43-55; Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (1936; repr., London: Cass, 1963), 254; and

Thomas Wentworth, unfamiliar with the Maroons' martial style, observed to Secretary of State Newcastle, "the Negros, My Lord, can not properly be put into the list of fighting men, . . . we having found by experience that they are not very willing to expose themselves to the enemies fire," but nevertheless "thought proper to arm most of these people, and to employ them in Night parties to reconnoitre, and disturb any Parties the Enemy might have sent out with the same Intention."[27] Though Wentworth seems to have learned quickly how to make creative use of his experienced enslaved and free Black bush fighters, he did not heed Admiral Edward Vernon's advice to act with all possible haste before the deleterious effects of the climate set in.[28] Thousands of the troops arrayed before Cartagena succumbed to sickness before they could attack the city; the British army became, in Wentworth's vivid terms, "little better than a moving Hospital," forcing its retreat.[29]

The decimation of the British army by disease and their inglorious withdrawal from Spanish Cartagena alarmed and mortified Britons across the Atlantic world and inspired debate concerning how the British could more effectually wage war in the West Indies. Shaped by their decade-long experience of the Maroon War, colonial officials suggested that enslaved Black men could be molded into an effective fighting force that could better withstand the effects of the

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David Syrett, "The Navy Board and Transports for Cartagena, 1740," *War in History*, 9, no. 2 (2002): 127-141. British colonists had earlier deployed free and enslaved Black soldiers in offensive maneuvers in mainland North American frontier areas such as the border region between British Carolina and Spanish Florida. See Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) and Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1974).

[27] Wentworth to Newcastle, 20 December 1741, CO 5/42, ff. 63-66, TNA; A Journal of the Expedition that Sailed from Spithead to the West Indies, CO 5/41, f. 307, TNA.

[28] Admiral Edward Vernon to General Thomas Wentworth, 6 Oct. 1740, VER1/2/Q and 16 and 26 March 1741, VER1/2/S, Vernon Papers, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England (hereafter NMM).

[29] Wentworth to Vernon, 23 Nov. 1741, Add. MSS 40829, f. 41, BL. At a Council of War held on Board his Majesty's Ship the Princess Carolina, in Carthagena-Harbour, 24 April 1741, in *Authentic Papers relating to the Expedition Against Carthagena Containing Original Letters between the Admiral and the General Their Councils of War &c*. 2nd ed. (London, 1744), 99-100. On the influence of disease on the British expedition against Spanish Cartagena and Guantánamo, Cuba, see J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean. 1620-1814* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 149-69.

climate in the Caribbean than could European regulars. In 1741, Governor Trelawny counselled Newcastle that 1,000 enslaved pioneers and "about 300 [enslaved men] to be used as a sort of Hussars to go before & on the flanks of the main body to hinder ambuscades which they are extremely well adapted to" would prove useful in the impending expedition against Santiago de Cuba. Trelawny opined to Newcastle that though Black soldiers were at present "unfit to fight in order of battle . . . they might be made very fit for that purpose with time & discipline." Having witnessed firsthand the martial skill of the Maroons and the limited effectiveness of European regulars when faced with the climate and terrain of the Caribbean islands, Trelawny proposed to Newcastle that the army purchase 1,000 slaves "to serve as Soldiers under white Officers" as an alternative means of staffing the British army in the West Indies. In doing so, he echoed many of the arguments Gregory had advanced in 1736 in support of his proposal that enslaved Black men be freed to serve as soldiers, but in the wake of the inglorious retreat from Cartagena, Trelawny added another: that employing enslaved soldiers who "would save the lives of [white soldiers] greatly in all fatigues of service."[30]

Though in his original proposal Trelawny did not suggest that Britain free those enslaved men it purchased to serve as soldiers, in a subsequent missive to Newcastle he remarked, "in order to secure the fidelity of these negroes, it will be adviseable before they land to promise liberty to such of them as do not desire to return to their masters." Trelawny reasoned that "should they be tempted by the Offer of Liberty from the Spaniards to revolt from us, they would undoubtedly render it impracticable for our men to spread themselves about the country, & render it perhaps ineffectual our whole design." To inoculate the Santiago de Cuba expedition against such a threat, Trelawny maintained, Britain should offer liberty to its enslaved recruits

[30] Trelawny to Newcastle, 17 May 1741, CO 137/57, Part One, ff. 62-3, TNA.

before the Spanish could. Moreover, he averred, as "it will be necessary for us to give liberty to such of the Spanish negroes as shall come in to us, it must naturally occasion great hand burning in our negroes if they are not made free too." According to the colonial official who had enacted the accommodation with the Maroons, to ensure the steadfast service of its enslaved soldiers, Britain needed to liberate them. He considered the "near £50,000" cost of purchasing the freedom of these men well worth the return, as the British army would gain combatants who "will do the greatest hurt to the enemy when landed by harassing them & ravaging about, &." In procuring and freeing enslaved Black men to serve as soldiers, Trelawny contended, Britain would be establishing a regiment that could ensure the success of future West Indian campaigns.[31]

The British ministry did not act upon Governor Edward Trelawny's 1741 proposal that the British army purchase enslaved men to serve as soldiers, but the exigencies of war in the West Indies would bring such an expedient into limited practice by the end of the Seven Years' War and into extensive practice with the establishment in the 1790s of the British West India Regiments, regular companies staffed by thousands of enslaved Black soldiers.[32] Like White provincials and Native American auxiliaries in mainland North America and Indian sepoys in South Asia, enslaved and free Black West Indians became foot soldiers in Britain's eighteenth-century wars for empire.[33] As the scale of British Atlantic military expeditions expanded over the

[31] Trelawny to Newcastle, 29 May 1741, CO 137/57, Part One, ff. 101-102, TNA.
[32] On Britain's deployment of Black soldiers in the Seven Years' War, see Maria Alessandra Bollettino, "'Of equal or of more service': black soldiers and the British Empire in the mid-eighteenth-century Caribbean," *Slavery & Abolition* 38:3 (2016), 510-33. On the British West India Regiments, see Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) and David Lambert, *Soldiers of Uncertain Rank: The West India Regiments in British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[33] On British deployment of sepoy troops in this period, see G.J. Bryant, "Indigenous Mercenaries in the Service of European Imperialists: The Case of the Sepoys in the Early British Indian Army, 1750-1800," *War in History* 7 (2000): 2-28; Christina Welsch, *The Company's Sword: The East India Company and the Politics of Militarism,*

course of the eighteenth century, the British military's need for armed combatants and military laborers put them in direct competition with West Indian slaveholders for enslaved and free Black labor. West Indian slaveholders preferred to retain control of the enslaved and free men of African descent upon whose labor, including the labor of providing them with security, they relied. Though at first British military officials relied upon slaveholders to furnish them with enslaved soldiers and laborers and upon local planters to recruit free soldiers of color, by the close of the Seven Years' War and increasingly in the late eighteenth century, they opted to cut colonists out of the equation when recruiting Black men for expeditions in the Americas. In purchasing rather than leasing enslaved soldiers and issuing direct appeals to free men of color to enlist in established regiments of their own by the War for American Independence, the British military came to play a vital role in shaping the contours of the African diaspora, the nature of the institution of slavery, and the experiences of enslaved and free people of African descent in the eighteenth-century British Empire.[34]

The experience of the First Maroon War played a constitutive role in prompting British imperial strategists in Jamaica and in London to imagine and to deploy enslaved Black West Indians as a martial resource, which indicates the active role that men of African descent themselves played in shaping British officials' views of them as potential subjects of empire.[35]

1644-1858 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); and Channa Wickremesekera, *'Best Black Troops in the World': British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy, 1746-1805* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002).

[34] On the British Army's direct appeals to free people of color during the American War for Independence, see Maria Alessandra Bollettino, Matthew P. Dziennik & Simon P. Newman, "'All spirited likely young lads': free men of colour, the defence of Jamaica, and subjecthood during the American War for Independence," *Slavery & Abolition*, 41:2 (2020), 187-211.

[35] On subjecthood in the Caribbean and the broader British Atlantic World, see Caitlin Anderson, 'Old Subjects, New Subjects, and Non- Subjects: Silences and Subjecthood', in *War, Empire, and Slavery, 1770–1830*, ed. Jane Rendall, Nicholas Guyatt, and Richard Bessel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 201–17; Christopher L. Brown, 'From Slaves to Subjects: Envisioning an Empire without Slavery, 1772–1834', in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–40; Brooke N. Newman, 'Contesting "Black" Liberty and Subjecthood in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1730s–1780s,' *Slavery &*

The Maroons secured official recognition of their freedom and land as well as the right to bear arms and administer justice for noncapital crimes – rights of subjecthood that other free people of African descent in Jamaica did not enjoy – and they styled themselves the king's loyal martial subjects, donning the coats of British officers and the medals, chains, and cockades that symbolized their commission from the governor.[36] Kathleen Wilson has explored "how the Maroons' practices and representations as both insurgents and peacekeepers circulated across the European empires," expanding "the valences of blackness" both within and "beyond the Atlantic, where their unique performances of freedom and militarism resonated across national and imperial boundaries."[37] Wilson rightly contends that militarism offered men of African, Asian, and indigenous descent a viable path to recognition as subjects of the British Empire, but as her nuanced analysis makes clear, it was a fraught path that had boundaries and complex and contradictory reverberations. The Jamaica Assembly worked to erode the autonomy and rights of the Maroons over the course of the eighteenth century and flouted them entirely following the Second Maroon War of 1795, when the Earl of Balcarres, Governor of Jamaica, deported the Trelawny Maroons to Nova Scotia rather than honor a treaty that General George Walpole had proffered and to which the Trelawny Maroons had agreed, which would have increased their landholdings and affirmed their recognized rights.[38]

The fact that British military officials came to perceive Black West Indian combatants as "ethnic soldiers" highlights the limits of Black West Indians' agency in the mid-eighteenth

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Abolition 32, no. 2 (2011): 169–83; Hannah Weiss Muller, *Subjects and Sovereign: Bonds of Belonging in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 121–65.

[36] Kathleen Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire: Theater and Performances of Power in the British Imperial Provinces, 1656-1833* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 213-14, 217. On the military spectacle of the British West India Regiments, see Lambert, *Soldiers of Uncertain Rank*.

[37] Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire*, 202-04. For an extended discussion of the Maroons' "Performances of Freedom," see Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire*, 201-50.

[38] Campbell, *Maroons of Jamaica*, 175-90, 238-42; Wilson, *Strolling Players of Empire*, 220-21, 227.

century and what they were able to gain as a result of their martial contributions to the British Empire. Wayne E. Lee has defined "ethnic soldiers" as "soldiers or warriors recruited for the skills they possessed as a part of their lifestyle and their regional or cultural form of warfare. In other words, they were recruited for who they were (or, at least, who they were perceived to be), rather than what they could become through training."[39] While the First Maroon War forced British officials to acknowledge and respect Black men's competence and courage, it also solidified the perception that Black men could withstand arduous labor in tropical climates. The First Maroon War – and the contributions of Black soldiers to the British Empire that were its legacy – thus served at once to undermine and reify the racial assumptions that undergirded Atlantic slavery. Erica Charters and Tim Lockley have elucidated the role played by the British military's empirical and scientific observations of soldiers' bodies in the development of racial theories in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[40] The theories and practices that were born of the First Maroon War laid the groundwork for these as well as for "martial race" theories and practices of military recruitment that would emerge and evolve in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[41]

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[39] Lee excludes enslaved Africans from the category of "ethnic soldiers" as they were "neither local nor indigenous," but as British officials routinely described men of African descent as possessing a fitness for war in tropical climates and rugged terrain that was not shared by Europeans, the term may apply to those black West Indians who fought on behalf of the British at mid-century. See Wayne E. Lee, 'Projecting Power in the Early Modern World: The Spanish Model?' in *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World*, ed. Wayne E. Lee (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 10 and 16, n. 26. See also Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

[40] Erica Charters, "Making bodies modern: race, medicine and the colonial soldier in the mid-eighteenth century," in *Racializing the Solder*, ed. Gavin Schaffer (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6-23 and Tim Lockley, *Military Medicine and the Making of Race: Life and Death in the West India Regiments, 1795-1874* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[41] See Gavin Rand and Kim A. Wagner, "Recruiting the 'martial races': identities and military service in colonial India," in *Racializing the Solder*, ed. Gavin Schaffer (New York: Routledge, 2013), 24-45 and Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

Importantly, theories and practices concerning the military recruitment of Black soldiers in the West Indies developed as a result of ongoing dialogue among colonial and military officials and men of African descent. Enslaved and free men of African descent understood and capitalized upon their martial value to the empire. Time and again they negotiated the terms of their military service, for instance by refusing whenever possible to leave the relative safety of their home islands, understanding that service abroad removed them from the networks they had cultivated and exposed them to kidnapping and sale. They nurtured relationships with their military commanders, who served as advocates for them as they claimed freedom, recognition, and rights based upon their military contributions to their colonies and the empire of which they were a part. Their efforts to parlay their military contributions into increased autonomy, status, and rights notwithstanding, liberty and the full rights of British subjects remained elusive for Black West Indians in the eighteenth-century British Empire.

Free and enslaved Black men's martial exploits during the First Maroon War convinced the author of *An Essay concerning Slavery* and some colonial officials to propose that a select few enslaved men be freed and regimented to defend the island against its internal and external enemies. Speaking of such a freedman, the author of *An Essay concerning Slavery* asked, "Won't he be ready to go out upon parties or against a Foreign Enemy . . . and could he not be trusted? Which the Slave cannot be so well, at least surely."[42] But the author envisioned not complete liberty but instead a liminal legal status between being "absolutely a Slave" or "licentiously free, free from all Restraints of Law" for those head slaves their enslavers opted to manumit.[43] Though these freedmen would no longer be enslaved, neither would they be completely free. They would be expected to defend the British Empire without being welcomed to join their

[42] *Essay concerning Slavery*, 49.
[43] *Essay concerning Slavery*, 53-54.

fellow Britons in their renowned devotion to and full enjoyment of liberty. The author described "the generous Free Briton" as one who "knows the Value of Liberty," "loves and enjoys it," and "prizes it above Life."[44] It is evident from his willingness to curtail their freedom that he did not intend the "black sons of Hydra" to be "free Britons" in the fullest sense of the appellation. He meant the freedom offered these men to benefit the British Empire, not the individual enslaved. Ironically, enslaved Black soldiers' effective martial service in the mid-eighteenth century convinced British officials that even such a limited liberty as the author of *An Essay concerning Slavery* proposed need not be offered enslaved recruits. It would not be until the Revolutionary Era at the close of the century that British imperial and military officials would consider extending freedom to those enslaved men who fought on behalf of the Empire, underscoring both the influence and the boundaries of Black West Indians' agency in the early and mid-eighteenth-century British Empire.

[44] *Essay concerning Slavery*, 27.