Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2019. xii + 302 pp. (Cloth US\$40.00)

Johnhenry Gonzalez's fascinating book, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti*, offers something of an antidote to current trends in historiography of the Haitian Revolution that either celebrate the Revolution and its achievements as a testament to the universality of human freedom, racial equality, and human rights, or focus on the impact of the Revolution elsewhere in the slaveholding Atlantic world more than on its legacies in Haiti. Gonzalez thus examines on-the-ground realities of early nineteenth-century land and labor practices among the rural masses and their innovative modes of resistance to the State and nation-building policies of governing elites that would undermine their freedom. The book therefore deals with the first half century of Haiti's socioeconomic development and its transformation from a colonial plantation slave society to an independent nation of peasant producers operating on the fringes, if not entirely outside the grips, of a predatory state—hence the title of the book and the characterization of Haiti as a “maroon nation” in both a metaphorical and a literal sense.

Gonzalez argues that Haiti did not become a nation of smallholding peasant producers simply because the plantation system had collapsed after thirteen years of revolutionary warfare; it collapsed because a substantial portion of the ex-slave population were determined to make it so. In short, they “were the true ‘econocides’ of the early modern Caribbean” (pp. 35–36), and they created something entirely unprecedented in the region—a decentralized rural economy based on autonomous household crop production, characterized by a patchwork of small-scale landholdings and agricultural practices grounded in African traditions. Having thus destroyed the slave-based plantation complex, early Haitian peasants forged new opportunities to redefine landholding patterns that met their own needs and conformed to their own vision of what it meant to be free.

The book consists of six chapters that explore the diverse multifaceted manifestations of postemancipation marronage throughout the late revolutionary and early national periods of Haiti's history. Chapter 2 provides the historical background for the “maroon nation” thesis with an overall description of Haiti's colonial slave plantation society and a recounting of the revolutionary events that led to slave emancipation and French citizenship in 1793/94. What followed was a succession of coercive plantation labor regimes intended to restore commodity crop production and exports in a time of internal strife and foreign occupation. Throughout this turbulent period and well into the civil wars of postindependence Haiti, conditions were ripe for former slaves

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to resist their condition of nonfreedom in ways that replicated the practice of marronage under slavery. By seeking refuge in hills and mountain retreats and appropriating land on which to grow their own crops, they began to undermine the plantation system, and ultimately destroyed it. Chapters 3–6 examine the various regimes of forced labor implemented by Haiti's rulers between 1804 and 1820 and the patterns of evasion and resistance developed by plantation laborers to create novel forms of land appropriation. Not all acquisitions followed the maroon model. Some were in the form of land grants to military officers, others took the form of outright purchase or even barter, and because land in postindependence Haiti was both abundant and at prices low enough to make acquisitions within the reach of most Haitians, the destruction of the plantation-based economy was thus accomplished "relentlessly from below" (p. 172). As such, Haiti's early rulers had to reconcile themselves to the irrepressible quest of former slaves for land of their own, while maintaining domination through an exploitive system of taxation, notwithstanding the innovative techniques of tax evasion devised by the peasantry.

Gonzalez's all-inclusive concept of "maroon nationhood" remains somewhat problematic. Characterizing Haiti in its totality as a "maroon nation" (including even a bourgeoisie aligning itself with foreign interests), he treats almost all forms of resistance and evasion as marronage. In so doing, he bypasses those instances in Haiti's history of overt, often armed resistance "from below," aimed at challenging, not escaping, the domination of an oppressive state in the name of social justice, civic equality, and inclusion. Nonetheless, the originality and importance of Gonzalez's book lies in its wide range of largely unexploited archival sources, and in his creative use of relevant contemporary and secondary works, to document the hidden social, cultural, and agrarian practices of Haiti's *moun en deyò* in creating and defending an alternative world of peasant autonomy and individual freedom.

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