

Caribbean Stories

LAND OF THE *Fatherless*

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Land of the Fatherless

By Fabian Comrie



Early Jamaica

In 1494, Christopher Columbus and his crew landed in Jamaica. It was their second voyage to the Americas. Shortly after, Spain occupied the island and established a sugar industry through enforced slave labor. There was no gold to be found in Jamaica. The island was inhabited by Taino Indians. Due to the rigorous working conditions the Spanish enforced on them, their population diminished quickly. Indentured servants were acquired from the Middle East for their expertise in sugar production. The labor force was replenished with imported African slaves. The Jamaican sugar industry grew and became very profitable. Livestock, various ground provisions, fruits and vegetables were introduced to the island and cultivated widely. The Island's first infrastructure was created, and Spanish Town became the first capital city of Jamaica.

Compliance with slavery did not go well with some of the Africans. Many of them ran away and settled in the mountainous forest interior of the island. They were called Maroons. Some of the remaining Tainos joined the Maroons. The Maroons survived by farming, hunting wild pigs, and raiding sugarcane plantations and farms belonging to the Spanish. The plantation raids freed more slaves and hampered the Spanish progress.

In 1655, a British naval fleet commanded by Admiral William Penn and General Robert Venables, after a failed campaign to capture Hispaniola, set sail southwest to Jamaica. They took command of Jamaica and drove out most of the Spanish. Some of the Spanish escaped with the help of the Maroons. The British captured the island without much resistance. However, they might have been unaware that they had the Maroons to contend with.

The British established their government and secured themselves against a counter attack from the Spanish. The Spanish were not able to launch a counter attack because they lost majority of their naval fleet to the British, off the Canary Islands coast, in 1657.

During the seventeenth century, Spain had many cargo ships importing gold from Mexico, South and Central America. In 1658, the English government appointed a large company of men to serve a sinister cause. The British called them privateers. Later, they were called pirates and buccaneers. Most of them were desperate people, without hope, opportunities, friends, family, and country.

Port Royal, Jamaica became the base for the privateer. Their unscrupulous activities became legitimate under the auspices of the British government. They created turmoil and distributed agony as they robbed many ships belonging to Spain. The British and the privateers profited immensely. Approximately fifteen years later, Great Britain and Spain made an official agreement to disband the privateers. It was part of the declaration in the Treaty of Madrid known as the Godolphin Treaty of 1670. The government of Jamaica concealed the treaty from the privateers, and at that time, Henry Morgan, a privateer leader, took on several perilous endeavors and succeeded. The British government captured Henry Morgan, but he was vindicated because it was proven that he had no knowledge of the treaty. Because of his success, King Charles knighted him, and made him Lt. Governor of Jamaica. He remained in Jamaica, and in 1688, when he was fifty-three years old, he passed away.

The privateers who decided not to abide by the Treaty were no longer affiliated with the British government. The British government had abandoned the cause. The privateers were now called buccaneers and pirates. They were no longer welcomed in Jamaica, so they made their base in the Bahamas. Bounties were hired to capture and destroy them. Many pirates became infamous and rich. Many met a tragic fate.

Port Royal, in that era, became the richest city in the world. In

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1692, it was devastated by an earthquake and most of the city submerged under the sea.

Jamaica, under British rule, continued investing and expanding the sugar industry with the implementation of African slaves, resulting in an infringement upon the Maroon civilization. The Maroon raids increased, many slaves were freed, and war resulted. In the eastern Blue Mountains were the windward Maroons, and in the western Cockpit Mountains were the Leeward Maroons. Other pockets of Maroon communities existed throughout the Island, and these communities were united for the most part.