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Johnhenry Gonzales, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. 320 pp. ISBN: 978-030-02-3008-6.

Johnhenry Gonzalez's important book, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti*, offers a fascinating account of how Haiti, the first free Black state in the Americas born of slave revolt, became "history's only maroon nation" (p. 15). By outlining the ways in which Haiti's foundational institutions were created and shaped by formerly enslaved people who fled to the countryside (maroons), Gonzalez pushes back against nineteenth-century (and present-day) narratives of Haiti as a failed state. Gonzalez invokes the Haitian historian Jean Fouchard's thesis that *marronage* was central to the formation of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804).<sup>1</sup> While not refuting Fouchard, Gonzalez inverts this point of analysis by illustrating how the revolution itself produced the maroons. Perhaps more importantly, it was precisely these poor runaway – and revolutionary – rural communities who influenced the actions of Haiti's elite class and therefore the Haitian state. In doing so, Gonzalez argues, Haiti's poor masses were able not only to become self-sufficient, but to help forge Haiti's place in the nineteenth-century Atlantic World.

Gonzalez argues convincingly against using the term "peasantry" to refer to those Haitians who shaped the postrevolutionary history of the country "from below". Referring to the rural population in this way, he notes, "carries the danger of disregarding the range of social distinctions that emerged from the ashes of the slave system" (45). To complicate existing narratives and better tell this history from below, Gonzalez takes on what he describes as the "provocative paradox of a society that was somehow too capitalistic for the emergence of powerful business interests" (30). This is key because it sheds light on the ways in which both the Haitian masses and the elite classes engaged in counterinstitutional practices. Yet, it was the smallholding agricultural producers who determined the trajectory of Haiti's economy. They were what Gonzalez deems the "true econocides of the early modern Caribbean" (p. 35).

Gonzalez's *Maroon Nation* is split into six chapters. The author draws on sources from the Haitian National Archives, as well as from repositories in the United States and France. Chapter one puts forward the author's maroon nation thesis and outlines his methodological

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death* (New York: Blyden Press, 1981).

and theoretical interventions. By making clear and important distinctions between the Haitian state and the populace, Gonzalez lays the groundwork for the three chapters that follow. In chapter two, Gonzalez provides a brief historical analysis of the Haitian Revolution and examines the foundational frameworks of what he calls “postemancipation marronage” (37). Chapters three and four engage in a scathing critique of Haiti’s early rulers and their respective forced labor regimes. Chapter three focuses on Jean-Jacques Dessalines’ attempts at forcing Haiti’s formerly enslaved population back into state-administered sugar plantations. It is precisely in resisting these coercive labor practices that Haiti’s poor masses appropriated land in order to produce their own harvests. In short, they prevented what Gonzalez calls the “creation of the powerful, monolithic, and economically rationalized nation-state that (Jean-Jacques) Dessalines and his successor, (Henry) Christophe, endeavored to construct” (38).

Chapter four explores the civil wars – particularly the conflict between Christophe’s northern kingdom and Alexandre Pétion’s southern republic – and the insurrectionary movements in the post-independence period leading to the fall of Christophe’s monarchy in 1819. Ultimately, this chapter posits that Haitian runaways were not only successful in bringing Haiti’s plantation order to an end, but that they also forced the hand of the Haitian state in accepting “their unique system of independent farms” (39). Chapters five and six – on the questions of land and the rural economy respectively – round out the book. In chapter five, Gonzalez outlines the triumph of the southern Haitian republic vis-à-vis the unprecedented system of land ownership that emerges in the rural areas of the country. For instance, prior to Jean-Paul Boyer’s ultimate triumph over Christophe’s monarchy in 1820, Alexandre Pétion offered land grants to rank-and-file soldiers. Gonzalez argues that these measures were some of the “most radical decrees of the entire Haitian Revolution” (171). In sum, farmland was sufficiently accessible for Haiti’s rural masses that it no longer functioned as a commodity. In chapter six, the ties between the rural economy and the problem of state taxation are explored. Zooming in on what he calls “elite marronage” (260), Gonzales shows how the Haitian state and an exploitative elite instituted an abusive system of taxation. Yet, Haiti’s rural masses were nevertheless able to squat on former plantations and move into rural areas. They effectively subsisted on their own and distanced themselves not merely from a centralized state, but from the market economy altogether.

*Maroon Nation* shows how thousands of formerly enslaved individuals were able to nurture and re-create West African cultural and political practices to engage in an emancipatory politics centered around land ownership. In doing so they became small farmers who, rather than engaging with European cultural and ideological forms, came to “associate all forms of subservient employment with slavery” (15). Yet, one is left wishing for a nod at the ways in which longstanding cross-border marronage in the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo may have influenced Haiti’s rural masses. Did Spanish ideological dispositions around governance, rights, and land ownership shape the ways that Haiti’s revolutionary small-scale farmers conceptualized their maroon nation? This minor quibble aside, Gonzalez has provided an original and important book which will undoubtedly help reframe some of the debates around Haitian revolutionary studies. Further, it will be particularly useful to scholars interested in

agrarian history/studies. Gonzalez has shown how Haiti's rural populace "profoundly shaped the new nation" (43) by developing an alternate agrarian sovereignty despite both domestic and foreign attempts at control.

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