MAROON AND SLAVE COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH CAROLINA BEFORE 1865

Tim Lockley and David Doddington*

IN THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, REVISIONS TO LONG-STANDING concepts of "community" have played a significant role in enriching our understanding of the complexity of enslaved life in North America. Few historians suggest any more that enslaved people were inexorably bound together by shared oppression, and work on topics as diverse as the informal economy, family life, courtship, and honor have effectively combined to refute the myth of an "idyllic slave community" that Peter Kolchin warned was at risk of developing from revisionist histories.[1] There has been greater focus on temporal and geographical differences in enslavement as well as the spatial distinctions at play in everyday life; methodological critiques, such as Anthony Kaye's, have stressed the need to reformulate dynamics of exclusion and inclusion through more practical geographical specifics.[2] In light of such scholarship, historians now emphasize the nuanced, flexible, and dynamic relationships at the heart of "multiple slave communities continually in flux and inhabited by real people."[3] In a recent historiographical summary, Jeff Forret concludes that "any romanticization of the slave community is rapidly drawing to a close."[4]

Much of the latest scholarly work concentrates instead on slave conflict, reasonably reminding us that, in Dylan Penningroth's words, "there is no reason to think that the black community in the 1800s was any more harmonious than the white community."[5] It is this body of literature that the present article hopes to build on, particularly with regards to exploring

* Tim Lockley is reader in comparative American studies at the University of Warwick. David Doddington is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Warwick.

[1] Peter Kolchin, "Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of American History* 70 (December 1983): 579–601.

[2] See Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[3] Jeff Forret, "Conflict and the 'Slave Community': Violence among Slaves in Upcountry South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 74 (August 2008): 551–588.

[4] Jeff Forret, "Early Republic and Antebellum United States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, ed. by Robert L. Paquette and Mark M. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 227–250.

[5] Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 8.

resistance and solidarity among the enslaved. Historians have documented how overlapping communities and neighborhood distinctions complicated the politics of slave solidarity. Indeed, it has been noted that the very act of forming supportive communities could mean the exclusion of those deemed outsiders, with Kaye remarking that the enslaved established principles of solidarity "most pointedly in capturing runaway strangers from outside the neighborhood."[6] It is clear that when discussing resistance and runaways, early revisionist notions of a "code of the group," whereby fugitives could simply rely on the support of their fellow slaves, has been dismantled in favor of more detailed explorations of particular contexts and personal considerations.[7]

Yet while encounters between slaves and individual runaways have been used to provide evidence of the divisions within the black populace of North America, interactions between enslaved communities and members of another distinctive type of community, maroons, have received less attention. Maroon communities were formed by escaped slaves in woods, swamps, and mountains throughout the southern United States. Although "many runaway slaves left their plantations only for short periods of time and were either caught or returned voluntarily after a few days or weeks," some had the skill and will to form autonomous communities in the wilderness and "had no intention of returning to slavery."[8] These communities were organized comparatively free from white interference and offer us the opportunity to see how African Americans established themselves when they had a limited chance to do so. However, judging from the historiography, maroon communities are viewed as less important in North America than in the Caribbean or Latin America.[9] This is perhaps understandable when

[6] Kaye, *Joining Places*, 120.

[7] John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 76.

[8] Timothy James Lockley, ed., *Maroon Communities in South Carolina: A Documentary Record* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), ix.

[9] See, for example, Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); Gad Heuman, ed., *Out of the House of Bondage: Runways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World* (Totowa, N.J.: Frank Cass and Company, 1986); Patrick J. Carroll, "Mandinga: The Evolution of a Mexican Runaway Slave Community, 1735–1827," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19 (October 1977): 488–505; Paul Lokken, "A Maroon Moment: Rebel Slaves in Early Seventeenth-Century Guatemala," *Slavery and Abolition* 25 (December 2004): 44–58; Mavis C. Campbell, "Marronage in Jamaica: Its Origin in the Seventeenth Century," in *Comparative Perspectives on Slaves in New World Plantation Societies*, ed. Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977), 389–419; Gilbert C. Din, " 'Cimarrones' and the San Malo Band in Spanish Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 21 (Summer 1980): 232–262. Exceptions include Herbert Aptheker, "Maroons Within

one considers the undeniable impact of marronage in these regions, and it is not our intention to claim that the practice was as extensive in North America as it was in Jamaica, Surinam, or Brazil. Whereas these regions saw the creation of viable and enduring maroon communities far from European settlements, at times containing thousands of runaways, the evidence suggests that marronage in North America was on a far smaller scale. Nevertheless, numbers are not everything. To dismiss maroon communities or subsume them within the rubric of runaways may overlook their potential to further our knowledge of the tensions between overlapping communities of people and the politics of solidarity among the enslaved. Maroon communities could challenge neighborhood distinctions, exposing conflicts and negotiations that crossed plantation boundaries. Furthermore, considering the relative strength and aggression of maroon communities in comparison to individual or smaller groups of runaways seeking flight, those who remained in bondage were forced to negotiate and interact with them in different ways.

This article concentrates on South Carolina because evidence of maroon activity is more abundant for this state than any other. This is not to say that maroon communities were absent in other parts of the South: maroons were active wherever and whenever slavery existed, especially in Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama. Colonial slave populations were, of course, more African and less acculturated than their nineteenth-century descendants. Even so, marronage occurred from the oldest states along the Atlantic seaboard to the newest southwestern additions. As early as 1729, the governor of Virginia reported that a group of runaway slaves had settled "in the fastness of the neighbouring mountains," and he feared they "would very soon be encreas'd by the accession of other Runaways and prove dangerous Neighbours to our frontier Inhabitants."[10] While the Appalachians were attractive in the eighteenth century due to sparse European settlement, they did not retain their allure after the American Revolution as whites spread inland. In fact, the largest single maroon community in North America was almost certainly formed in the Great Dismal Swamp on the border between Virginia and North Carolina. One visitor to the area in 1784 was told that "run-away Negroes have resided in these places for

the Present Limits of the United States," *Journal of Negro History* 24 (April 1939): 167–184; Aptheker, "Additional Data on American Maroons," *Journal of Negro History* 32 (October 1947): 452–460; Daniel O. Sayers, P. Brendan Burke, and Aaron M. Henry, "The Political Economy of Exile in the Great Dismal Swamp," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* (March 2007): 60–97. Lockley's *Maroon Communities* is the most recent attempt to foreground marronage in the United States and contains all of the surviving primary-source material for South Carolina.

[10] Quoted in Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 30.

twelve, twenty, or thirty years and upwards, subsisting themselves in the swamp upon corn, hogs, and fowls, that they raised on some of the spots not perpetually under water, nor subject to be flooded, as forty-nine parts of fifty of it are; and on such spots they have erected habitations, and cleared small fields around them; yet these have always been perfectly impenetrable to any of the inhabitants of the country around, even to those nearest to and best acquainted with the swamps." Consequently, runaways "in these horrible swamps are perfectly safe, and with the greatest facility elude the most diligent of their pursuers."[11]

The attraction of the Dismal Swamp for maroons—namely, its inaccessibility—also means that we have few accounts of the communities formed there, since literate whites rarely risked visiting its dense interior. Far better documented are the maroons of South Carolina. Of all the colonies (and the states that came later) on the mainland of North America, South Carolina most closely replicated the demography of Caribbean islands like Jamaica, Barbados, and Hispaniola. By 1708 enslaved Africans formed a majority of South Carolina's population, the only mainland colony in which this happened, and in the coastal parishes dominated by rice plantations, up to 80 percent of the population was enslaved. The slave population of South Carolina also was more African and became creolized more slowly than the other significant concentration of slaves in colonial North America in Virginia. Even in the 1780s, about a third of the one hundred thousand slaves living in South Carolina had been born in Africa.[12]

Given that South Carolina had a large enslaved population, many of whom had memories of freedom before enslavement, it is not surprising that a significant number ran away. Between 1732 and 1801, slaveholders advertized for more than two thousand fugitive slaves in South Carolina newspapers, though this likely was only a small fraction of those who actually ran away since advertising was expensive and many masters hoped, not unreasonably, that fugitives would return. Even when slaves fled due to mistreatment, the desire to be back among family and friends on the plantation usually was strong. Plus, comparatively few slaves possessed the survival skills to remain truants for long. Most returned home voluntarily, hungry and cold, or were caught by special hunting parties of overseers and dogs. Runaways were predominantly young and male, and they had often

[11] John Ferdinand Smyth, *A Tour of the United States of America: Containing an Account of the Present Situation of That Country* (1784), in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, xvii.

[12] Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 58–61.

been sold several times.[13] Some during the colonial period struck out for freedom among Indians tribes in the West or the Spanish in Florida; in the nineteenth century, they headed for the North. An intermediate step was marronage, remaining hidden relatively locally to the place of enslavement, but with no intention of returning to slavery. These maroons usually found strength in numbers by banding together with other runaways and built camps for themselves that afforded shelter and sometimes a communal planting ground.

It should be noted that no contemporary South Carolina source used the term "maroon" to describe long-term fugitives. It is used here to distinguish maroons from the short-term truants, even though both can legitimately be termed "runaways." There is no set definition as to when a truant evolved into a maroon, but being absent for a considerable length of time was a key criterion. The South Carolina legislature itself made a distinction between truants who were absent less than three months and those "notorious runaway slaves who shall be run-away 12 months." The latter, "which runaway and lie out for a considerable space of time, at length become desperate, and stand upon their defiance with knives, weapons or arms," could be pursued by any white person, and "if such run-away cannot be otherwise taken it shall be lawful to kill such notorious offenders."[14] Most maroon communities existed for a few years, but the Savannah River maroons, who lived on the border between South Carolina and Georgia and came to prominence in 1786 and 1787, had existed since at least 1782 and could well have developed from older maroon communities that resided in the same location as far back as 1765.[15]

The geography of low-country South Carolina was exceptionally conducive to the formation of maroon communities. Numerous rivers, of which the Santee, Cooper, Ashley, Edisto, and Savannah were only the most notable, slowly meandered their way toward the sea and were edged by large, interlocking swamps. While rice cultivation tamed the tidal swamps adjacent to South Carolina's major rivers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the plantations fronting the rivers normally backed up to extensive, overgrown swamps. These "back swamps" were different from the rice swamps because, despite both being areas of low, marshy ground, the poor drainage of the back swamps rendered them unsuitable for tidal

[13] Daniel E. Meaders, "South Carolina Fugitives as Viewed through Local Colonial Newspapers with Emphasis on Runaway Notices, 1732–1801," *Journal of Negro History* 40 (April 1975): 288–319.

[14] R. Nicholas Olsberg, ed., *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, 23 April 1750–31 August 1751*, Colonial Records of South Carolina (Columbia: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1974), 287–288.

[15] On this particular group, see Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, chap. 3.

cultivation. To planters the back swamps, dominated by large cypress and tupelo trees, were of little productive use and consequently ignored. This neglect left many spaces for maroons to occupy and make their own. Thus, while plantations were ostensibly places of order and regimentation, the back swamps remained marginal zones untamed by Europeans, densely forested and full of dangerous fauna such as alligators and snakes. Since planters frequently owned large tracts of land, the typical layout of a plantation involved a "big house" close to the river and a "settlement" for the slaves, often some distance away. This arrangement placed the enslaved close to the swamps and gave them the opportunity to become familiar with these uninhabited environments. As one historian notes, the woods and swamps were liminal areas "that planters owned but that slaves had mastered."[16] It is all too easy for contemporary maps to give the impression that white mastery extended over the entire landscape, but planter control of the isolated back swamps was loose at best.

References to maroon activity in South Carolina start in the early eighteenth century and continue to the Civil War with peaks during the imperial crisis of the 1760s, in the aftermath of the American Revolution in the 1780s, and during the 1810s and 1820s. While the enslaved population in South Carolina did evolve during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, becoming increasingly acculturated and less African, it seems to have had minimal impact on marronage. There is little to suggest that maroons in South Carolina were more likely to have been born in African than America or vice-versa. Rather, marronage appears to have flared up when whites were divided amongst themselves, as they were over the Stamp Act or during the Revolution, with the enslaved attempting to seize upon lapses in vigilance brought about by the unrest.

Maroon groups were initially formed by runaway slaves who met either by accident or design in woods and swamps that were sufficiently remote to permit the creation of a separate settlement with semi-permanent buildings. One maroon settlement in 1765 was "a Square Consisting of four Houses seventeen feet long and fourteen feet wide"; among the supplies in the "town" were "Kettles . . . fifteen Bushels of rough Rice Blankets Potts Pales Shoes Axes and many other Tools."[17] Another camp was described in 1787 as being "700 yds in length, & about 120 in width." It contained twenty-one houses, enough to accommodate up to two hundred people, with "the whole of the cleared land . . . planted in rice and potatoes."[18] Food

[16] S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 67.

[17] South Carolina Council Journal, December 9, 1765, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 20.

[18] Colonel James Gunn to Brigadier General James Jackson, May 6, 1787, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 58.

in their bellies and roofs over their heads were vital for maroons' enduring survival, and their success in securing these essentials is documented. A maroon camp found near Georgetown in 1824 "consisted of snug little habitations" stocked with "ducks, turkeys, vegetables, and beef" as well as plenty of rice. A nearby camp two years later included "a large quantity of beef . . . a fine fat cow . . . pots, clothes, a hog pen, wells dug, and every necessary preparation for a long residence."[19]

Maroon communities stood a better chance of lasting if they had sufficient people to help safeguard the settlement, and indeed, one of the distinguishing features of maroons was that they tended to band together in a common cause. Ideally, maroon communities needed people to tend crops; to obtain additional supplies of food, utensils, and weapons; to act as sentries; and if necessary, to fight. Groups of five to ten individuals were less likely to thrive than groups of twenty or more. Estimates of the size of maroon communities in South Carolina ranged from a "band" or "gang" of up to ten people to "large gangs" or "great numbers," which perhaps amounted to more than a hundred.[20] With reports of maroons being "abundantly provided with delicacies as well as necessaries," it is perhaps not surprising that their secret settlements acted as something of a magnet for runaway slaves.[21] New fugitives augmented the numbers of maroons, and ultimately, whites came to believe that one of the main threats posed by maroon groups was that they encouraged and attracted additional runaways. Maroons, by definition, had managed to remain beyond white control for some time, and planters felt that this success meant "others are encouraged to follow the same course and those at home become disorderly and insubordinate."[22] Planters in Christ Church Parish, north of Charleston, described how the good escape of one runaway in 1822 had resulted in another joining him in 1824 and an additional five, parents with three children, "joined the same ring leader" in 1825.[23]

Maroon communities differed from other types of communities formed by Africans and African Americans in South Carolina in a number of interesting ways. For one thing, they were, by necessity, far more concerned with security. Plantation slaves could not organize military-style units, nor were

[19] *Charleston Mercury*, December 24, 1824, and *Georgetown Gazette*, June 13, 1826, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 121.

[20] For examples of maroon communities that supposedly were more than one hundred strong, see South Carolina Commons House of Assembly Journal, January 14, 1766, and *Gazette of the State of Georgia* (Savannah), October 19, 1786, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 24, 45.

[21] *Charleston Mercury*, December 24, 1824, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 121.

[22] South Carolina General Assembly petition, 1829, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 124–125.

[23] Ibid.

their villages protected by hidden paths, sentries, and earthworks. Maroons had these security measures since they existed in a state of permanent crisis due to the fear of military attack. It is noteworthy that maroons in Jamaica and Surinam employed similar defensive techniques, possibly suggesting a common African origin.[24] Settlements were constructed far from navigable rivers, and finding them required long treks across difficult terrain. One band of soldiers in pursuit of a group of maroons travelled "at least four miles" into a swamp, some of the time through waist-deep water, all the while exposing themselves to alligator attack.[25] Such conditions deterred all but the most determined pursuers, and even when settlements were found, they could be well fortified. Surrounding one camp was "a kind of breech work about 4 feet high" constructed out of "logs & cane that came out of the cleared ground," while the single, narrow entrance "would admit but one person to pass at a time." One hundred and fifty yards downstream, a sentry was posted, and "about two miles below their camp they had fallen large logs across the creek in order to prevent boats passing up (small canoes might pass at high water)."[26] Another settlement was "situated on small elevations, surrounded by extensive arrears of marsh. By climbing a high tree on each of them, a complete view of the bay, creeks and surrounding island, was presented to the spectator, while he could remain concealed by the foliage."[27]

Only well-armed, highly drilled, and disciplined troops could hope to launch an assault on a maroon settlement, especially when the defenders would almost certainly have advance warning of attack. Informal posses of planters lacked both the numbers and the tactical know-how to seriously threaten the largest settlements. Maroons were often organized into small companies, each with guns, which acted as independent raiding parties or were able to launch pincer movements against enemies. One camp contained over thirty guns, giving maroons a formidable volume of firepower.[28] Assaults on maroon positions, even by regular troops, evidently entailed risk. In one such attack in 1786, four soldiers were wounded and "the Negroes came down in such numbers that it was judged advisable to retire to their boats, from which the Negroes attempted to cut them off." A complete rout was only averted by the discharge of a piece of field artillery loaded

[24] Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 52.

[25] South Carolina Council Journal, December 9, 1765, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 20.

[26] Gunn to Jackson, May 6, 1787, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 58.

[27] *Charleston Mercury*, December 24, 1824, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 121.

[28] South Carolina Council Journal, December 9, 1765, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 20.

with grapeshot, which wounded many of the maroons.[29] Maroon leaders even gave themselves military titles such as captain or general; one maroon in the 1780s called himself "Captain Cudjoe" in imitation of the famous Jamaican maroon leader of the 1730s.[30] Internal leadership disputes could occur over the "share of plunder" and concerning raiding policy, but unity of purpose was crucial to the long-term survival of maroon communities. Only by working together for the collective good could maroons hope to obtain sufficient food to live and have a chance at defending themselves against attack.[31]

Maroon societies also were heavily masculinized in comparison to other African and African American communities in North America. Men constituted about 80 percent of fugitives from plantations, according to several studies of runaway advertisements in newspapers, and they tended to predominate among maroons.[32] The relatively small number of women who joined or were forced into maroon groups undertook specific roles in the community. These included planting rice and vegetables in specially cleared spaces and caring for children. No women took part in raids or were reported as being armed—such activities were exclusively male. There were occasional reports of children living among maroons, but the skewed gender ratio and the short-lived nature of many maroon communities resulted in limited opportunities for family formation. Maroons were therefore more likely to reside in homosocial groups than those who remained enslaved, with an emphasis on communal and collective violence and the absence of families that might curb such tendencies.

To those remaining enslaved, we might anticipate that maroons became heroic, perhaps even mythic, figures. Maroons who struck against planter authority and power were quite possibly fulfilling the secret desires of the oppressed. While overt resistance could spell summary execution for slaves and individual runaways faced tremendous difficulties in escape, maroons had the capacity to fight back. In 1786 two white men of Christ Church Parish "came upon a camp of runaway Negroes" and captured two of them. However, within hours the rest of the maroon gang, apparently numbering more than twenty, had ambushed the white men, shooting one of them dead.[33] In such direct refutations to notions of black cowardice and

[29] *Gazette of the State of Georgia*, October 19, 1786, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 45.

[30] See Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 63.

[31] "Trial Record of Lewis," May 21, 1787, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 65.

[32] Meaders, "South Carolina Fugitives," 292; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 211–212.

[33] *Columbian Herald* (Charleston), May 18, 1786, and *Charleston Morning Post, and Daily Advertiser*, June 15, 1786, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 42.

inferiority, maroons offered a symbolic and actual threat to slavery and white mastery that conceivably could inspire others. Some masters certainly believed that maroon communities interacted with slaves across plantation boundaries and were provided with information to help them avoid white hunting parties. Charles Manigault, owner of Silk Hope Plantation on the Cooper River near Charleston, commented that "no overseer, or Planter should speak on such subjects even before a small house boy, or girl, as they communicate all that they hear to others, who convey it to the spies of the runaways, who are still at home."[34] Such cooperative and protective networks of solidarity support assertions by historians that the enslaved could share a code of honor with fugitives and fighting maroons, showing "respect to one another by hiding and feeding runaways and refusing to betray other bondsmen."[35]

Yet the extant sources singularly fail to suggest that maroons were actively assisted by plantation slaves on a regular basis. To the contrary, they highlight the constant tension and negotiation that marked interactions between the two groups. Maroons were forced to engage with plantation communities since no maroon settlement was entirely self-sufficient, but it is clear that the plantation terrain could become a battlefield. For maroon communities, neighboring plantations were vital sources of corn, beef, bacon, and other supplies such as tools, guns, powder, and ammunition. In fact, the evidence points to maroons regularly entering plantations to gain needed supplies. These visits were often characterized as "raids," like the one at a Mr. Wolmar's plantation which resulted in the removal of "every valuable he possessed."[36] Of course, it is possible that slaveholders were unwilling to countenance the complicity of their slaves in assisting maroons, but the enslaved may have had their own reasons for resenting these kinds of encroachments and shared their owners' opinions of them, particularly considering that the communal aspect of marronage commonly made the thefts more materially significant than those of individual runaways. Furthermore, the militaristic nature of the incursions could place members of the raided community in very real danger.

Maroons took what they wanted or needed, even though this may have adversely affected plantation slaves. If maroons put the enslaved community in danger or at risk of punishment, then rather than receiving food supplies

[34] James M. Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor on Argyle Island: Letters and Documents of a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833–1867* (Savannah, Ga.: Beehive Press, 1978), 313.

[35] T. J. Desch Obi, *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Art Traditions in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 112.

[36] General James Jackson to Governor George Matthews, no date, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 46.

from the plantation population, it was far more likely that they would be betrayed. On occasion slaves actively assisted whites in the recapture of maroons, and the more desperate, violent, and notorious the maroon, the more likely it seems that other slaves aided in their capture. In February 1820, a young white man, Thomas Deliesseline, was killed on his father's plantation on Dewee's Island, north of Charleston, by a "party of runaway negroes." Some maroons were apprehended at the scene but Albro, the one who shot Deliesseline in the face, escaped. Apparently unconcerned about the loyalty of his slaves, Deliesseline's father "armed his Negroes, and sent them in pursuit of the murderous gang," but Albro had swam from the island back to the mainland and attempted "to secrete himself in one of Mr. Hibben's negro houses." It was left to Hibben's enslaved driver to calmly effect Albro's capture.[37] Drivers occupied contentious positions of power that could be used to abuse or protect other slaves, and T. J. Desch Obi notes that "status in the master's culture was not always enough to override steadfastness" with rebellious or resistant slaves.[38] However, in this instance, the driver had no qualms about apprehending a dangerous individual and handing him over to whites, even though the fugitive's fate would have been certain.

Sometimes slaves were forced to help their masters pursue runaways. Planters hunting maroons on the Pee Dee River in 1826 took with them "several trusty negroes," who presumably were familiar with the river swamps and could act as guides. While these slaves had no choice but to do as their masters instructed, those sympathetic to the maroons could have delayed the search or deliberately led their masters away from known camps. In this case, though, a camp was discovered, but the maroons escaped into an "impenetrable" swamp.[39] Planter threats could be enough to persuade slaves to betray the location of maroons, if only to avoid being beaten themselves, but it also is apparent that some slaves actively desired to ingratiate themselves with whites. It was most likely the prospect of financial reward that led two slaves, Tom and Jack, to brave "every hazard" in order to bring about the apprehension of one of "a gang of lawless & desperate runaways" near Georgetown.[40] The captured man was later

[37] *City Gazette and the Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Charleston), February 10 and 14, 1820. Albro was executed on March 4. Ibid., March 6, 1820.

[38] Obi, *Fighting for Honor*, 112. For more information on drivers, see James M. Clifton, "The Rice Driver: His Role in Slave Management," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 82 (October 1981): 331–353.

[39] *Georgetown Gazette*, June 13, 1826, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 121.

[40] South Carolina General Assembly petition, 1834, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 119.

tried and executed, while Tom and Jack received fifty dollars each from the South Carolina legislature.

If possible rewards tempted some slaves to betray maroons, the actions of maroons themselves could be sufficient to alienate other slaves. Due to their militaristic structure, maroon communities were more capable than individual runaways of making daring armed raids on plantations, and these inevitably led to the risk of injury to slaves. The use of buckshot meant that even a well-aimed blast from a firearm could accidently maim or even kill an innocent nearby slave, and sometimes lethal violence could be used quite deliberately—shared oppression was not sufficient to spare slaves from maroon violence. In November 1822, travelers in Saint Andrew's Parish, just outside of Charleston, were being "continually robbed by a gang of armed runaway Negroes." Among their victims were "several negroes [who] were stopped and money and clothes taken from them and their persons kept in custody 'till after night."[41] Targeting slaves was an obvious avenue whereby maroons could lose the support of those who remained enslaved. When maroons near Wilmington, North Carolina, were reported to be "frequently robbing slaves" and "threatening to perpetrate more atrocious crimes," it did not take long before "people of their own color informed against them." A white posse swiftly captured all of these maroons as a direct result of the information given by slaves.[42] In addition, some slaves might have resented the incursions by maroons on plantations, especially when they stole food. Any loss of provisions meant there was less food to be distributed to the slaves, and where masters lost significant sums through the depredations of maroons, they may have tried to recoup some of their losses by cutting allowances of food and clothing to the enslaved population.

Forcible kidnapping significantly affected the attitudes of plantation slaves towards maroons. One such coerced slave, Theron, testified as to how a chance encounter on the road resulted in his being forced to join a maroon gang. The maroon leader, Ben, "told Theron he must go with him and not go home as he feared should he be permitted to return he would inform that he had seen him which would prevent his being able to get away his wife and Children from his Mistresses Plantation." Theron spent some months living as a maroon, raiding plantations for cattle and other necessities, all the while claiming to be afraid to flee "as the Negroe Ben had sometime before shott [*sic*] a fellow named Cork . . . for saying he wanted to go home." Eventually, however, the opportunity to take a boat and escape

[41] *City Gazette and the Commercial Daily Advertiser*, November 2, 1822, and *Baltimore Patriot*, November 19, 1822, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 105.

[42] *Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, N.C.), October 28, 1828, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, xviii.

arose, and Theron went back to his home plantation, signifying one example where personal and communal ties were more important than the relative freedom offered by marronage. While Theron's story of intra-slave conflict could have been the self-serving testimony of an otherwise implicated individual, his experience was corroborated by another slave named John. John declared that Ben had threatened to kill "every Negro who should refuse to join him." This aggressive stance towards plantation slaves was clearly counterproductive. Ben failed to garner the support of local slaves, who perceived him as a threat rather than a figure to be lauded. Ultimately, the information provided by John and Theron was extremely helpful to white planters, who used it to locate and destroy Ben's maroon camp.[43]

Slaves who helped whites capture and kill maroons could be regarded as self-seeking, but they also may have been defending a particular sense of community. While individual runaways were forced to negotiate more subtly across neighborhood boundaries, the aggressive nature of marronage complicated the politics of solidarity among the enslaved in a direct manner. Runaways could and surely did threaten and coerce help from other slaves at times, but maroons were able to produce systematic violence. Where maroons acted violently against those left on the plantations by injuring or kidnapping them during raids, slaves had a vested interest in protecting themselves and their families from harm. These maroons had in effect gone rogue, failing to discriminate between those who had been responsible for their oppression—the white planters—and those who had shared it—the slaves. To the maroons, plantations were treasure troves of supplies to be plundered as required, regardless of who suffered as a result.

The story of one maroon leader in South Carolina gives further insight into how plantation slaves perceived and interacted with maroons. Few maroons had such an extended career as Joe. Physically imposing, "in the prime of life, a very stout and athletic man, at least six feet high," Joe's body bore testimony to his violent lifestyle, with "a scar on one of his cheeks, (believed to be the right) occasioned by the bite of a negro in a fight; a scar from the cut of a sabre, believed to be on his right arm; [and] shot marks in both of his legs."[44] Although he first appears in the written records in May 1821, Joe might well have been among a group of "runaway negros" hunted in the Santee River swamps near Pineville in the summer of 1819, since this is close to where he eventually would be killed in 1823.[45] If Joe

[43] South Carolina Council Journal, December 9, 1765, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 19–20.

[44] Proclamation of Governor Thomas Bennett, May 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 98.

[45] Diary entry of Henry Ravenel, July 12, 1819, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 90.

was leading a maroon gang through the innumerable swamps adjacent to the Santee River from as early as 1819, he did so in a manner that at first did not attract much attention from local whites. All that changed on the night of Sunday, May 27, 1821. Joe, together with two accomplices, landed on the plantation of George Ford on South Island near Georgetown with the intention of stealing cattle. Ford was alerted to their presence and went to investigate, but had barely set out when he was shot and killed by the maroons. The gun "had been loaded with slugs, and a ball," and the use of numerous projectiles obviously increased the chance of hitting the target. Unfortunately for Ford, "the principal part of the slugs entered his head—the ball penetrated his breast," killing him instantly. It was not just Ford who was injured by the raiding maroons, as two of Ford's slaves also were hit by gunshots, "one of them severely near the temple and in the groin." It was perhaps as a direct consequence of the violence perpetrated against the blacks that another of Ford's slaves "concealed himself behind the ox that had been killed in the hopes to detect them in their attempt to remove it." When this indeed happened, one of the maroons was captured. Another maroon was detained by the militia four days later, but Joe escaped into the swamps bordering the Santee.[46]

The Santee River swamps stretched from the Atlantic coast nearly to Columbia, more than one hundred and fifty miles, and Joe evidently knew them well. His "old camp" was in the large swamp at the confluence of the Wateree and Congaree Rivers, which formed the Santee below Columbia, close to his original Richland County plantation. He was variously mentioned as hiding in swamps in Lancaster, Charleston, and Georgetown Districts, all of which bordered the Santee or Wateree Rivers. After the murder, Joe's immediate thought was to head inland from the coast, where George Ford's plantation was located and the hunt for him was most intense, and find refuge in the Georgetown District swamps until the search died down. At several points during the manhunt, Joe came into contact with plantation slaves, and on occasion, he received food and, most importantly, information. Newspapers reported, "He has been several times driven into such situations as afforded the strongest hopes of his being taken; but the intelligence and support furnished him from some of the neighboring plantations have hitherto assisted him to elude his pursuers."[47] It is not known whether the "intelligence and support" were given voluntarily or extorted, but on at least one occasion, Joe forced a free black woman at gun point "to give him a considerable quantity of bacon, corn and ammunition."[48]

[46] *Charleston Courier*, June 1, 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 95.
[47] Ibid., June 11, 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 101.
[48] Ibid.

Hope of capturing Joe slowly faded and eventually he made his way inland, where he resumed his life of raiding plantations for supplies and recruits. On one such raid, at Dr. Lewis Raoul's plantation in Sumter District, Joe seized an apparently unwilling woman "as his wife." Some months later, a slave of Colonel J. B. Richardson was instrumental in "rescuing" this woman and returning her to Raoul, but in revenge for this act, Joe led a five-man armed raid on the Richardson plantation, singled out the slave as he worked in the fields, and killed him. Such a daring raid, in broad daylight and in front of the overseer, was a strong signal to other slaves that Joe had no fear of white authority and was willing and able to inflict violence on slaves that crossed him, regardless of their master's protection. Joe's well-organized and heavily armed gang was able to act with impunity, striking when and where they chose, and few plantations would have had sufficient armed white men at the ready to mount an effective resistance. As if to prove his preeminence, Joe later returned to Raoul's plantation and took the rescued woman away again.[49]

Joe's relationship with the enslaved was therefore somewhat utilitarian. Those who provided food, ammunition, and information, whether voluntarily or coerced, were very useful, and it is doubtful that Joe could have survived so long as a maroon without their help. Furthermore, his violence and thefts did not deter everyone; new runaways augmented his band and ensured that he remained a formidable force, even after the capture and execution of certain gang members. Where Joe met resistance, he responded with violence and little regard for the wishes of other slaves. Women were taken by force, and those who opposed him could expect little mercy. Richardson's slave had been "long threatened" for his actions in rescuing the woman from Joe's camp, demonstrating that his killing was no heat-of-the-moment response, but rather a cold, calculated act of revenge.[50] The kidnapping of individuals and brutal acts against perceived enemies—white and black—were hardly intended to endear Joe to those who remained enslaved.

For more than two years after the death of George Ford, Joe continued his bandit lifestyle with whites seemingly powerless to stop him. In the summer of 1821, local militia units spent time trying to capture Joe, and newspapers were full of praise for the "spirit and alacrity evinced by the different military corps, in their laborious and indefatigable pursuit, [which] entitle them to the highest commendation."[51] Some militia forces "have been day and night occupied in scouring the woods and swamps to the distance

[49] *Southern Chronicle* (Camden), September 17, 1823, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 108.

[50] Ibid.

[51] *Charleston Courier*, June 1, 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 96.

of twenty or thirty miles from town, notwithstanding the extreme heat of the weather and the heavy showers to which they have been exposed."[52] In spite of all this exertion, Joe remained at large. In July 1821, the Charleston *Times* commented: "The subtle African continues his lodgement [*sic*] in the border of the swamps, and prowls around the neighbouring settlements, in defiance of all the efforts that have been made to apprehend him."[53] Joe was definitely the master of his environment. At one point, the newspapers reported that he was trapped on "a peninsula, or narrow strip of swamp, bounded by the Santee on one side, and a lake, which unites with the river, on the other. There is but one point at which he could escape by land, and that, we understand, is closely guarded."[54] A few days later, however, it was acknowledged that Joe had "escaped the vigilance of his pursuers in this neighbourhood."[55]

By the early autumn of 1823, one local newspaper despaired that more than two years had elapsed since the murder of George Ford, yet Joe was still on the loose. The editors were aware that he "uses the most dense and impervious swamps, places himself at the head of fugitive slaves," and "arms them," and they lamented the fact that "this accomplished villain has been pursuing his course of plunder in the most tranquil and uninterrupted manner."[56] The Charleston newspapers had little clue as to how to catch him, though. One group of citizens in Pineville, which was located along the Santee River in extreme northern Charleston District, formed the Pineville Police Association on October 2, 1823, specifically "to devise a plan for apprehending" Joe, or "Forest," as he was being called by this time.[57] Joe was now "encamped in the vicinity of the [Santee] canal," and his "gang of desperate runaways . . . have committed many depredations in this neighborhood and elsewhere." Local whites were conscious that the maroon camp was "sheltered by the difficulties of an approach" and the maroons were "strengthened by fire-arms and other weapons of offence." Confident in their secure location, the maroons "threatened the lives of many individuals . . . and carry on unmolested a system of open violence and robberies."

Joe's depredations had not been confined to whites, and planters hoped to exploit the possible divisions between maroons and those who remained

[52] Ibid., June 4, 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 97.

[53] Reported in the *Providence Gazette* (Providence, R.I.), July 18, 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 104.

[54] *Charleston Courier*, June 11, 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 101.

[55] Ibid., June 15, 1821, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 102.

[56] *Southern Chronicle*, September 17, 1823, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 108.

[57] Secretary's Book, October 2, 1823, Pineville Police Association Records, vol. 1, 1823–1840, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 110.

enslaved to their advantage. One planter, William Dubose, thought that "by secret offers of Reward to certain negroes, their agency and Assistance might so far be obtained, as to enable a party judiciously posted to surprise and take them."[58] The members of the Pineville Police Association agreed to this plan, suggesting that they were reasonably confident they could find a slave willing to betray Joe. In this they were correct: a slave named Billy, owned by Austin Peary, provided "active and ready co-operation" in planning the capture of Joe, but events in the meantime rendered Billy's help superfluous since Joe was killed on October 4. When the Pineville Police Association met again on October 5, Billy was paid forty-seven dollars because Dubose believed that "but for Circumstances not within the controul of either Party complete success must have perfected their designs. This fellow had fulfilled with Fidelity the Duties imposed upon him, and had endangered his Life in the execution of them." It is unclear why Billy cooperated with Dubose, though the financial incentive was substantial. Whatever his motivation, Billy evidently had little sympathy and solidarity for Joe and the other maroons and was willing to work with whites despite the possible threat of reprisal.[59]

Joe's demise was affected by a "party of 23 men" who came down the Santee River from Clarendon District, and while contemporary newspapers make no mention of the involvement of a slave named Royal in luring Joe from his swamp refuge, other sources indicate that he played a pivotal role. Royal was a patroon, commanding a trading vessel that plied the river. "With considerable judgement [*sic*] and address," he managed to lure Joe and three of his followers from their swamp hideout with an offer to trade. In reality Royal enticed the maroons into an ambush of armed white men, who immediately shot and killed Joe and his three companions. In 1824 eighty-one planters from central South Carolina petitioned the state legislature to manumit Royal, and consequently, for his "fidelity and good conduct in making himself the immediate instrument in bringing to merited punishment an offender, against the laws of the land, and against the laws of God, of the worst character and of the highest gravity," the state agreed to pay his owner seven hundred dollars for his freedom. The legislature declared that it was "the policy of this state to reward those slaves who thus distinguish themselves by way of inducement to others to do so likewise."[60]

It is doubtful that whites would have been able to catch Joe without black help. Joe's gang was reported to be "completely under his direction,"

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] South Carolina General Assembly petition, 1874, and committee report, 1825, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 117–119.

and he obviously was a charismatic leader; even whites acknowledged that "he had the art and the address to inspire his followers with the most wild and dangerous enthusiasm."[61] The runaways who joined Joe were fiercely loyal, suggesting that they were unlikely to betray him even if captured. The maroons had "the aid of fire arms," so a direct assault on Joe's camp was dangerous. Indeed, one white man was wounded by buckshot during the hunt for Joe's gang.[62] Whites also were mindful that Joe "had under his control whatever boats navigated that section of the river." Most of those undertaking the transport of goods on the Santee were slaves, and Joe used "threats and persuasion" to obtain "information of every movement made or plan devised" to capture him. Furthermore, "his intimacy and influence over the negroes in the neighbourhood of his encampment rendered every attempt which had been made to take him, abortive." Those who did not aid him were treated as enemies: "every individual who manifested a disposition to check him in his career of violence, or to assist in his apprehension" became "objects of his vengeance." By surrounding himself with those whose loyalty could be relied upon and gathering up-to-date and accurate intelligence through threats and persuasion, Joe was able "to act with impunity," committing "the most daring outrages, and in open defiance of the laws."[63] With his strategy evidently working and "emboldened by his successes," Joe "plunged deeper and deeper into crime, until neither fear nor danger could deter him first from threatening and then from executing a train of mischiefs we believe quite without a parallel in this country."[64]

If Joe's banditry was not enough to stir white slaveholders into action, his rumored "desemination [*sic*] of notions . . . among the blacks . . . calculated in the end to produce insubordination and insurrections with all the hideous train of evils that usually follow" compelled them to take his threat seriously.[65] It should be remembered that Denmark Vesey's plot occurred in Charleston while Joe was at large. Planters from Saint John's Berkeley and Saint Stephen's Parishes as well as Sumter and Richland Districts organized themselves into "companies" and "scoured Santee River Swamp from the confluence of the two rivers that form it to Murry's Ferry a distance even by land of sixty miles," but "wearied down by excessive fatigue and rendered dispirited by the number extent and character of their

[61] *Milledgeville Recorder* (Milledgeville, Ga.), October 21, 1823, and South Carolina General Assembly petition, 1874, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 112, 116.

[62] *Southern Chronicle*, October 22, 1823, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 113.

[63] *Milledgeville Recorder*, October 21, 1823, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 112–113.

[64] South Carolina General Assembly petition, 1874, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 116.

[65] Ibid.

places of retreat and concealment," they were on the point of giving up when Royal offered his services.

Royal took a considerable personal risk collaborating with whites, since he might easily have faced reprisals from those who supported Joe's banditry. Inasmuch as the written record is silent on Royal's motivation for helping slaveholders kill Joe, we are forced to speculate on why he actively sought to end Joe's career on the Santee. Perhaps the most straightforward reason that presents itself relates to Royal's employment. As a patroon, Royal transported goods on the Santee River, and Joe's activities, according to local planters at least, had disrupted traffic. Being a patroon was a privileged position, necessarily involving an unusual degree of freedom of movement. Patroons could be away from their plantations for lengthy periods and rarely had to endure close white supervision. It also was common for enslaved boatmen to conduct business on their own account; the Georgetown District Grand Jury complained about "the practice of negroes navigating the rivers and creeks in flats and boats, for cutting wood and other purposes and in this way carry on a traffic with negroes on the neighbouring plantations."[66] Joe's interference could well have reduced Royal's ability to make personal profit, while the precedent of his violent actions may have fostered fear and suspicion.

Joe's reputation for aggression toward those who opposed him was well known, and thus, any move against him needed to be decisive. Otherwise, it would only increase the risk of a revenge attack. Joining forces with armed whites made an assault more likely to succeed. While Royal may have hoped for a monetary reward or the manumission that he eventually received, records suggest that he volunteered his help freely and was not responding to either an offer of a reward or an approach by whites. Without Royal's assistance, local planters were convinced that they would have been unable to lure Joe out of his camp and ambush him. In order for the ambush to work, Joe needed to trust Royal, making it likely that the two had met previously. It is possible that Royal was one of those whom Joe had coerced with "threats and persuasion" to provide information on what local planters were planning. Joe's own security measures in this sense helped to bring about his downfall, since he assumed that by dealing only with fellow blacks, he was safe from attack. Despite his ill-treatment of slaves, it seems that Joe thought no black would betray him. Royal, however, was one slave who did not feel any sense of racial solidarity with a dangerous maroon.

[66] Presentment of the Grand Jury of Georgetown District, fall 1823, Grand Jury Presentments series, 1783–1877, Legislative Papers, 1782–1866, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

It is evident that communal bonds among black South Carolinians were flexible and could transcend issues of race or shared oppression. Solidarity was negotiable among the enslaved, and the terms could differ dramatically. Multiple black communities overlapped in South Carolina before 1865, and maroons operated across plantation borders. While drawn from the same black population as the slave community, they existed free of white control in a state of semi-permanent warfare. In order to maintain their independence, they took supplies and recruits from plantations, negotiating with some slaves and violently repressing others. For maroons the damage this did to plantation economies, and therefore to the slaves residing on those plantations, was secondary to the survival of their own community. Slave communities may have been broadly sympathetic to the courage and example set by maroons, but the individuals that constituted these communities had to make personal choices to ensure maroons did not cause harm to themselves or those they cared for. Slaves and maroons certainly could interact harmoniously, with reports of "extensive traffic" between the two groups on the wharves and streets of Georgetown.[67] Once raids on plantations began to impact slave communities negatively, however, support for maroons waned, and some actively assisted whites in their attempts to recapture or destroy maroon communities. Maroons may have offered a heroic vision of black resistance, striking back against white oppression, but few slaves were willing to see their own meager standards of living fall as a result.

The story of South Carolina's maroons reinforces the argument that historians lump all black people together at their peril. Multiple black communities existed in South Carolina—urban, rural, rice producing, cotton producing, domestic, field, slave, free—and to those we should add "maroon." The negotiations, violence, and betrayal that marked maroon and plantation relationships highlight further the complexity of interactions among the enslaved. Although clearly established that the enslaved developed "strategies of survival" within the confines of their bondage, it is worth emphasizing that no two strategies were the same, and some directly clashed with one another.[68] There were slaves who curried favor with masters to win indulgences, while others exploited loopholes in the system to trade stolen goods. Some ran away, and a small number chose to resist with violence. While black South Carolinians almost certainly shared a distrust and dislike of white control, maroon communities exerted power and influence over the enslaved, and their survival demanded a willingness

[67] *Charleston Mercury*, December 24, 1824, in Lockley, *Maroon Communities*, 121.

[68] See William Dusinberre, *Strategies for Survival: Recollections of Bondage in Antebellum Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

to lash out. This violence could threaten black as much as white, and in the politics of solidarity, maroons were not simply outsiders, but sometimes active threats.