

Spain's 1753 Plot to Free Dutch Slaves; or, Why There's Always Been a Fuzzy Border between Guyana and Venezuela

by David Jamison

“ . . . It is of importance that you should learn one of the most effective means to dislodge the [Dutch] foreigners on the coast of Guyana, or hem them in. Some years ago a number of rebellious negroes fled from their Colony of Surinam, whom, so far, they have been unable to reduce. If it could be arranged to support these negroes in such a way that it would be very difficult for the Dutch to reduce them, we may presume that perhaps . . . they would abandon the whole, or greater part of that territory.”

—Spanish Secretary of State Jose Carvajal, October 8, 1753

Over the course of the sixty years between 1763 and 1823, the Dutch Guianas experienced at least eleven major slave rebellions, each with slightly different characters and demands.¹ The 1763 Berbice Rebellion took control of half the colony and, prior to the Haitian Revolution, was the first slave rebellion that actually came close to overthrowing its sovereign government. At one point, the colony's governor was ferrying colonists downriver from plantation to plantation, desperately awaiting reinforcements. Although the Dutch eventually regained control of the colony with the help of foreign aid, historians generally agree that the incident demonstrated the meager resources they had put into empire-building.² And despite the fact that the 1763 Berbice Rebellion was one of the seminal events in the history of Atlantic world slavery, Spain's possible role in inciting the rebellion through intrigue, deception, and

¹ Eugene Genovese *From Rebellion to Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

² Pieter Emmer *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880 Trade, Slavery, and Emancipation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1998), 70, 97; W. J. Hoboken "The Dutch West India Company; The Political Background of its Rise and Decline" in M. A. P. Melink-Roelofs, ed. *Dutch Authors on West Indian History* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 131-132.

bribery is routinely left out of the narrative—but the story of King Carlos III's subterfuge in the years leading up to the Berbice Rebellion is a compelling tale. In an attempt to gain the upper hand in the Eighty Year's War, Carlos made a proclamation in 1753 granting freedom and territory to slaves who would help him disrupt the Dutch colonies in the Guianas. This threw an insurgent African population into direct contact with the native Carib population, who were used by Dutch colonial administrators as scouts and slave catchers.

The story behind Carlos' colonial intrigues starts at the crest of the Dutch Golden Age. At one point the Netherlands were positioned to be the dominant power in the New World. Soon after Spain and Portugal established trading posts in Africa and then partitioned the Americas roughly along the 60th west meridian, the Dutch followed after, motivated principally by an attempt to dominate Spain in the Eighty Years' War. The Netherlands had long been under the suzerainty of Spanish Hapsburg heirs, but in 1568 Carlos' great-grandfather, Philip II, had instituted a fierce policy against Protestantism. As a result, southern residents of the Spanish Netherlands began moving northwards into the Protestant-friendly north, the area today known as the Netherlands. This oppression initiated the war, in which the Dutch made headway partly due to their own economic thrift and partly due to Spanish strategic ineptitude. The Dutch eventually managed to secure a firm foothold along the western coast of Africa and in properties in North and South America by the end of the 16th Century.

However, out of all the European powers to explore the New World, the Dutch were probably the least interested in settler colonies. The Dutch entrepreneurial spirit was not that of a frontiersman working the land; it was that of a shrewd merchant who wanted to have already earned that fortune, and largely wanted to reap its rewards without getting his hands dirty. As a result, most slaveowners engaged in absentee proprietorship, entrusting that overseers would win

them the profits they thought they deserved. These plantations comprised huge gangs of regimented slaves. With overseers incentivized to get the maximum product out of a day, their only limits were anything that would keep the slaves healthy enough to work. A typical overseer would have far less invested in the emotional or psychological welfare of their slaves than, say, a slaver in the American South, who typically had to live and work amongst slaves for the long term. The Dutch overseer could be working on different plantations from season to season, and the only thing their referents would report about was production—not their laborers' mental health.³ African slaves began both fleeing and resisting these conditions almost immediately.

Traditionally, Caribbean slave rebellion has been attributed to autonomous factors, such as slaves simply becoming fed up with intolerable life-path options. But what if some of these rebellions were not only encouraged, but possibly even subsidized by competing European powers? In the flurry of the military conflicts of which we know the colonial Caribbean was such a fertile repository, and due to its relatively small geographic area and the surfeit of world powers attempting to dominate it, perhaps it is reasonable to assume that some administrators sought every available advantage. General Clinton's and Lord Dunsmore's proclamations to free American slaves during the Revolutionary War to destabilize the American economy testify at least to the fact that the promise of freedom had been previously used in the colonial era to disrupt an enemy's labor pool.⁴ Likewise, the incessant schemes by both Spanish and British administrators during the Haitian Revolution to use Saint-Domingue's freed slaves as a military force against the French—despite slavery still being legal in both their nations—testifies to the degree to which colonial powers would prostitute the spirit of their legal institutions if it would

³ H.U.E. Thoden Van Velzen *In the Shadow of the Oracle* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press 2006)

⁴ Benjamin Quarles, *North from Slavery*

give them an advantage in international conflict.⁵ Indeed, the United States' role in ending the 1898 Cuban War for Independence was seen by many to be a case in which an imperial power (the U.S.) fomented a black and white-led revolution despite having egregious issues with allocating political power to blacks within its own borders.⁶ But the idea to grant “freehold lands” to rebel slaves in order to set them up as a buffer zone between Spanish and Dutch territories, as Carlos proposed, was novel. Even the most famous attempt of the Spanish to grant freedom to runaway slaves—the 1693 decision to encourage British slaves in America to move to Spain’s Fort Mose in Florida—still involved Spanish suzerainty. Carlos’ desperate calculation that this added incentive would provide the manpower he needed spoke to an imperial pathology held by Western powers; one that entailed having the brown-skinned peoples of the world fight their battles for them as a doctrinal strategy.

“And, in like manner, you might offer the negroes who may wish to retire to civil life, liberty, and lands, where they may settle, either in the Island of Trinidad or anywhere else more convenient . . .”

In 1917, the German government was facing a perilous position. The British Navy had completely dominated Atlantic shipping lines, and had made it increasingly difficult for the Germans to re-supply or prevent the British from doing the same. Their only hope was a technological innovation that made them merciless marine adversaries—the *Unterseeboot*. Unfortunately, the Americans had already protested the use of the submarine on humanitarian grounds, and the Germans had inexplicably capitulated. But by late 1916, the only hope the German Navy had for success was to resume the use of the weapon, which would assure

⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins*: 124, 134; Miguel Barnet *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (Curbstone Press, 1994): 194.

⁶ Maria Iglesias Utset, *A Cultural History of Cuba: During the U.S. Occupation, 1898–1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2

American involvement in the war, which would then greatly increase the odds of a German defeat.

The Germans, however, had a fascinating bit of intrigue up their sleeves, and political upheaval caused by the Mexican Revolution proved an opportunity too perfect to pass it up. The Germans had long had operatives in Vincente Carranza's fledgling government, an administration that was desperately trying to wrest control from the forces of both Pancho Villa's populist rebels and American general John Pershing's expeditions into Mexico to capture him.⁷ In addition, tensions on the border between the United States and Mexico had bred near-virulent forms of racial antagonism between the countries. Due to Villa's penchant for fleeing into Texas when Carranza's forces overwhelmed him, many Texans had been harboring feelings of resentment that Mexico was unable to stabilize their government. Soon, those feelings led to the sentiment by many that Mexicans were somehow unfit to run a civilized government. At the time, an editorial in the *Houston Chronicle* bemoaned the "large and ignorant Mexican population" the state had in its midst.⁸ Two years earlier, during the botched Plan de San Diego, a San Antonio congressman's wife remarked how the alleged Texas-based uprising against the United States to "free Mexicans from Yankee tyranny" caused many of her fellow Texans to fear they would be "murdered in their little beds"—a familiar trope of pre-Civil War discourse in the South that was dredged up every time there was fear of a slave rebellion.⁹ By January of 1917, the preponderance of racism in Texan popular discourse gave way to its federal sanction. Upon publication of Mexico's new constitution, which decreased the role of foreign investment,

⁷ Mark Gilderhus "The United States and Carranza, 1917: The Question of De Jure Recognition" *The Americas* Vol. 29, no.2 (Oct. 1972), 220

⁸ Patrick L. Cox "'An Enemy Closer to Us than Any European Power': The Impact of Mexico on Texan Public Opinion before World War I" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* Vol. 105, no. 1, July 2001), 66

⁹ Cox "An Enemy Closer to Us than Any European Power," 63

Division of Mexican Affairs chief Leon Canova characterized Carranza as “temperamentally unfit, obstinate, egotistical, arrogant, and altogether inefficient.”¹⁰

Carranza was no innocent party in this, however. Feeling utterly disrespected by the American expedition, he let it be known that he would be receptive to the Germans using Mexican territory as a submarine base if they would publicly declare against American intervention in Mexico.¹¹ At the time, the Germans demurred so as not to be put in a position of drawing America into the war without Mexican military aid. But once Germany decided to resume unrestricted U-boat warfare on January 6, 1917, German foreign minister to Mexico Arthur Zimmerman became infatuated with the idea of testing out the level of Carranza’s antipathy toward the United States.¹² On the 12th, Zimmerman sent a telegram to Germany’s ambassador to Mexico, Heinrich von Eckhart, with a proposal. If Carranza’s government would be receptive to an alliance with Germany and Japan, Mexico could reclaim the territory lost to Mexico in 1836’s Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo after the war was over. The text was translated thusly:

"We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal or alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace." Signed, ZIMMERMANN.

¹⁰ Gilderhus “The United States and Carranza, 1917,” 217

¹¹ Gilderhus “The United States and Carranza, 1917,” 220-1

¹² Gilderhus “The United States and Carranza, 1917,” 221-2

The inclusion of Japan in the intrigue was not random. Just as he was aware of anti-Mexican sentiment on the Texas border, Zimmermann was also aware of the virulent anti-Japanese racism that was at the time causing friction between that country and the United States. Only fifteen years prior, America had formalized its Gentleman's Agreement with Japan, ensuring that the Japanese government would restrict emigration to America. Despite the agreement's civil title, it was a painfully embarrassing move to make by the erstwhile Empire of the Sun. In October of 1906, the San Francisco school board banned children of Asian immigrants from schools for whites, sparking more public outrage.¹³ The situation was exacerbated further in 1913 when the California legislature passed a law prohibiting Japanese immigrants from buying and owning land in the state.¹⁴ These turns of events pleased Germany greatly. If they could arrange the engagement of the United States in a war on its Pacific front, it would seriously hamper British designs on an Allied-controlled Atlantic. Although the Germans were leaders before the war in a Western-led campaign against the "yellow peril" threatening the integrity of the white race, once they knew there was no chance of teaming up with the United States against Japan, they sought Japanese rapprochement. However, Germany's attempt to exploit American racism against both Mexicans and Japanese was regarded by each country's respective leaders as what it really was: a poor tactical suggestion in relation to their most powerful neighbor, the United States.

King Carlos' "Zimmermann telegram" came in the form of a stratagem he commanded to be carried out by the chief of his boundary commission, a man named Jose Iturriaga. Longtime foes Spain and the Netherlands had actually been disputing the border between Guyana and

¹³ Ute Mehnert, "German Weltpolitik and the American Two-Front Dilemma: The 'Japanese Peril' in German-American Relations, 1904-1917" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 82, no. 4 (Mar. 1996), 1457

¹⁴ Mehnert, "German Weltpolitik and the American Two-Front Dilemma," 1466

Venezuela for years, owing largely to the fact that the Spanish, who had been in the area before the Dutch, felt that the preponderance of their Catholic missions in the area gave them a territorial claim to it. The Spanish had been for years been attempting to build relations with the natives, but had only been successful in convincing small pockets of Arawak-speakers to agree to adopt their new missionary lifestyle. While the Spanish would continue to establish relationships with Indian populations through their mission system of Christian conversion and cultural submersion, the Dutch found converting the Amerindians “impossible”¹⁵ and had been far more effective in establishing a trading and subsequent military relationship with the most powerful Amerindian polity in the area, the Carib nation.¹⁶ Contrary to popular perception, however, Amerindians did not work with Europeans out of some awed respect for Western civilization—they wanted compensation, and the Dutch knew it. Sometimes that compensation came in the form of food and goods, other times it was as simple as a promise not to be enslaved.¹⁷ Sociologist Brackette Williams likened Dutch use of Amerindians to “a police force whose loyalty and invaluable aid could be bought with an annual distribution of trinkets, symbols of office, payments for killings, and promises of exclusion from slavery.”¹⁸ In a letter dated Feb 28, 1761, a Berbice plantation owner very casually mentioned going to a neighboring plantation because he knew he would be able to find “a group of neutral Indians to do a new search” for runaway slaves.¹⁹ In an account of the 1763 rebellion written “from good authority,” European military officers used Indians as scouts during the campaign to recapture the colony.

¹⁵ *British Guiana Boundary; Appendix, Volume II, 11; British Guiana Boundary, 49*

¹⁶ *British Guiana Boundary, 37.*

¹⁷ For a survey of British and Dutch policy towards Guyanese Amerindians, see Mary Noel Menezes “The Dutch and British Policy of Indian Subsidy: A System of Annual and Triennial Presents,” *Caribbean Studies* Vol. 13, no. 3 (Oct. 1973).

¹⁸ Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins*, 134; Menezes “The Dutch and British Policy of Indian Subsidy,” 66.

¹⁹ TNA CO 116/33.

According to the record, a detachment of sixty men tracking rebel slaves “sent forward two faithful Indians to reconnoitre, with orders to be upon their Guard & at the same time to be as particular as possible . . . having mounted on a tree near the Plantation Building they Perceiv’d about 20 of the Rebels patrolling before the Garrison & keeping Centry. . . . They soon return’d & made their report.”²⁰

At one point during the Berbice Rebellion, the governors of the neighboring Dutch colonies of Essequibo and Demerara, Storm van s’ Gravesande and Laurens van Berch Eyck, were leery of the disorder spreading over into their colonies. So Essequibo’s Gravesande took the time to petition the colonial judicial council. He asked them to allot funds based on his belief that “between the two colonies the Indians must patrol under the promise of good pay, to warn our guards when they notice something.”²¹ Gravesande, of course, knew that out of the Africans, Europeans, and Indians in the Dutch Guianas, only the natives would have intimate enough knowledge of the landscape to ensure that no hidden routes to his colony would be exploited. A few months after Gravesande sent his letter, Demerara’s Berch Eyck revealed that Amerindians served not only as police but as intelligence agents. In May of 1763 he importuned a native leader to encourage his people to spy for the Dutch and bring “not false, but true reports,” a service for which they would be “very well paid.”²² The Caribs subsequently commenced to destroying several Spanish missions when they felt their territory was being encroached upon, which further weakened the Spanish position. These events highlight an area of colonial law that, due to its fuzziness at the time, leads to the fundamental dispute on the Orinoco River: The Spanish had believed that since they had established missions in the Orinoco region, that gave

²⁰ TNA CO 137/14.

²¹ March 12, 1763 Letter from Storm van s’ Gravesande to the Raad, TNA CO 137/14.

²² May 30 Journal Entry of Lauren Berchwyck, TNA CO 137/14. There is little room for confusion as to what the Dutch expected for their money. Berchwyck actually uses the Dutch word *spioneer*.

them legal domain over the area and its Arawak-speaking inhabitants. It was Dutch-armed Caribs who destroyed these missions, however. When the Dutch later settled on the territory, the Spanish asserted that it had been illegally annexed. Having never convened a Berlin Conference–like meeting to determine New World spheres of influence, the difference in the way the two powers “did business” with the native population sparked off a centuries-long territorial dispute along the Orinoco River that persists to this day.²³ The Dutch side of the Orinoco, Guyana, claims that the boundary between itself and Venezuela is some miles west of where Venezuela places it.

The scheme to incite Dutch slaves was most likely hatched by Spanish secretary of state Don Jose de Carvajal y Lancaster early in the year of 1753. It was in that year that he suggested, in a plan designed to surround Dutch territory with Spanish settlements, that if they formed a “semicircle in the interior,” they would be “in front of the territory where . . . revolted negro slaves of the Dutch dwell, and can easily give them help covertly for their raids against those Colonies, without engaging ourselves openly; and if their negroes place them in such a position that they will be compelled to abandon that situation, we shall take possession of the territory.”²⁴ In the fall of 1753, King Carlos was ready to move on the substance of Carvajal’s plot. Undoubtedly aware of the uneven black-white ratios that the Dutch had taken on in their transition into a slave-plantation economy, Carvajal sent an outrageously incriminating letter to Iturriaga:

“You are to contrive the most effective means possible to dislodge the foreigners on the coast of the Province of Guyana, or hem them in: and consequently it is of importance that you should learn one of the most effective means to attain that end with the Dutch.

²³ Pope Alexander VI’s 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, partitioning the Americas roughly along the 60th west meridian, only applied to and was abided by the Catholic imperial powers—but not Britain or the Netherlands.

²⁴ *British Guiana Boundary; Appendix, Volume II, 77*

Some years ago a number of rebellious negroes fled from their Colony of Surinam, whom, so far, they have been unable to reduce, although for that purpose a large body of European soldiers were brought out.

Now if, on our side, it could be arranged to support these negroes in such a way that it would be impossible, or very difficult, for the Dutch to reduce them, we may presume that perhaps the case might happen that they would abandon the whole, or greater part of that territory.

This expedient, although in itself it may appear unlawful, is not so, if we bear in mind that it simply reduces itself to a just satisfaction for they are constantly practicing in the reduction of the Orinoco, inciting and leading Caribs to hostilities, which are notorious . . .

With that object I am commanded by the King to communicate to you secretly this matter, so that, with the same secrecy, you may endeavor to incite the rebellious negroes against the Dutch so that they commit all the hostilities possible against them whether by destroying their estates and farms, or in any other way.

The means considered the most effective for that purpose will be to send among them some Spaniards with good wits and courage, so that they may direct and head them in their raids, the which will appear as outlaws of our nations. And in this manner the end will be attained without exposing ourselves to complaints and accusations, as they are the ones who execute the outrages.

Of course, it will be necessary that such persons are assured of receiving a reward corresponding to the work and danger, which your Excellency may offer them in the name of His Majesty, arranging and proportioning the quantity and quality according to the class of persons. And, in like manner, you might offer the negroes who may wish to retire to civil life, liberty, and lands, where they may settle, either in the Island of Trinidad or anywhere else more convenient, also assisting them with presents and means to defray the expenses of their journey, according as it may appear to you to further the interest with which you are charged, an assuring all that, whatever you offer in the name of His majesty, the King will approve and order to be executed.

And in case they dislodge the Dutch, his Majesty will maintain them as free subjects, and will give them freehold lands, and establish them in the same places which their antagonists are so fond of, assisting them to repel then if they return to regain them; or in any other territory of the King in which they may prefer to settle,

God preserve you."²⁵

The notion that the king of a powerful nation would attempt to defeat his enemies by pitting one subjected group against another subjected group seems somewhat hard to fathom absent our understanding of imperialist pathology. The Spanish government was one of the most powerful in the world, more than capable of holding their own against the incipient Dutch. At first one wants to dismiss Carlos' letter as a far-fetched attempt by the Spanish to gain ground in

²⁵ *British Guiana Boundary; Appendix, Volume II, 87.*

a losing effort, an effort which ultimately never amounted to anything. The Guyana-Venezuela border is on the west end of Guyana closest to the colony of Essequibo, and there were no major slave rebellions in Essequibo in 1753 or anytime soon thereafter. The next slave rebellion to happen in Guyana was in 1763 Berbice, but Berbice is the easternmost Dutch colony near the Guyana-Surinam border, on the other side of Demerara from Essequibo. The notion, then, that the Spanish would have influenced a rebellion on the other side of Guyana ten years later seems far-fetched at best.

A few inclusions in Dutch historian J.J. Hartsinck's history might give us pause, however. When a group of French soldiers who had deserted near Surinam's Courantyne river go to slave rebels for aid, Hartsinck reports that they sent two envoys "to ask for a free passage to the river Orinoco."²⁶ Surinam is on the other side of Guyana from Venezuela, and the Orinoco River is the main waterway of Venezuela, branching off into dozens of tributaries as it snakes east to west from the Amazon River to the Caribbean Sea. As early as 1729, Essequibo governor Hermanus Gelskerke had begun petitioning the King of Spain to cooperate in returning slaves who had escaped to the Orinoco.²⁷ The Spanish government was not amenable to these petitions, however, as they saw themselves as a safe haven for slaves willing to become Christians . . . *Catholic* Christians. This point of view was most eloquently stated decades later by Friar Benito de la Garriaga, ex-prefect of the Catalonian Capuchin Mission of Guyana, who pled that the Spanish, "cannot and must not restore" these runaways, who were "unjustly and cruelly seized" and "criminally enslaved" by the Dutch or, in the case of Indian slaves, by the Caribs, "when they have the good fortune to escape it by . . . availing themselves of the protection of their legitimate Lord and Sovereign (the Spanish king)" when the "slaves made their escape to obtain

²⁶ Hartsinck, "Berbice Revolt of 1763," Pt. IV, 46.

²⁷ *British Guiana Boundary*, 9.

the benefit of the Catholic religion.”²⁸ Gelskerke had not been impressed with Spanish missionary work in his tenure, however, claiming that the Spanish were of no benefit to these slaves even though when “the priests teach them a little mumbling, [they] highly pride themselves on having made Christians of them.”²⁹ By 1744, Essequibo commander Gravesande was petitioning the Dutch States General to establish a post in the Barima region between Essequibo and Orinoco in order to prevent runaway slaves from escaping to the Orinoco.³⁰ In 1707, the commander of Essequibo attempted to tax the river traffic coming through his colony, and particularly goods going to Berbice.³¹ By at least 1819, slaves had established escape routes running both from Demerara to Essequibo and from Demerara to Berbice.³²

And what of the ten years separating the secret Spanish plans and the Berbice revolt? The month after the confidential letter was sent, King Carlos decided that he had had enough Christian patience. In a scheme to win the Caribs over, he induced Iturriaga to offer “these savages . . . in his Royal name whatever presents might appear to you adequate” to “bring them into our Missions.” Iturriaga was further instructed that whatever he did “with that nation, as well as the revolted negroes, which will be treated in a separate communication” should be communicated to the Crown “by the first opportunity.”³³ In 1758, the Spanish attacked a Dutch post on the Cuyuni due to reports that a Dutchmen and Caribs had been illegally raiding the area’s Indians and selling them into slavery. This incident came to be known as the Cuyuni

²⁸ *British Guiana Boundary; Appendix, Volume IV*, 49–50.

²⁹ *Report and Accompanying Papers of the Commission Appointed by the President of the United States to Investigate and Report upon the True Divisional Line between the Republic of Venezuela and British Guiana, Volume II* (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1897), 261.

³⁰ *The Venezuela-Guiana Boundary: The Printed Argument on Behalf of the United States of Venezuela before the Tribunal of Arbitration* J.M. de Rojas, et. al (New York: The Evening Post Printing House, 1898), 525.

³¹ *The Venezuela-Guiana Boundary*, 484.

³² da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood*, 80.

³³ *British Guiana Boundary*, 89.

Affair.³⁴ This issue was not resolved until May of 1761, one year before the events that led to the Berbice Rebellion.

“[Inciting rebellious negroes], although in itself it may appear unlawful, is not so if we bear in mind that . . . [the Dutch] are constantly inciting and leading Caribs to hostilities, which are notorious . . . The means considered the most effective for that purpose will be to send among [the rebellious negroes] some Spaniards with good wits and courage, so that they may direct and head them in their raids, the which will appear as outlaws of our nations.”

In 1953, a group of young Marxists organized the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) to aid in the liberation of Angola from Portuguese rule. When the MPLA’s government in exile opened up offices in Tanzania and Zambia, it presented a tempting opportunity for both the Russian and Chinese governments. Both Tanzania and Zambia leaned socialist—Tanzania’s founder, Julius Nyerere, had even attempted to implement Soviet-style collectivization farms in his attempts to modernize his country. The two largest Communist governments in the world were soon providing Soviet weapons to the fledgling MPLA in their attempts to simply “achieve independence for Angola by means of a united front of all African interests.”³⁵ Due to these events and the radical orientation of MPLA leaders Augustino Neto and Mario Pinto de Andrade, the United States refused Neto’s appeal for aid. During the mid-1960s, MPLA military cadres began traveling to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, and in 1965, the MPLA began receiving training from Cuban forces.³⁶ In 1966, only a year later, former foreign minister Jonas Savimbi formed the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) to be a self-sufficient independence movement with strictly African

³⁴ *British Guiana Boundary*, 150.

³⁵ *Angola: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress, 1991), 26

³⁶ *Angola: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress, 1991), 31

leadership.³⁷ But it was only once a group of Portuguese officers pulled off a 1974 coup in Lisbon that dissolved the nation's empire that you could say, really, that the spigot had been loosed.

The world's superpowers saw the coup in Lisbon as another opportunity to fortify their positions regarding the global economy. By the next year, the United States was openly funding UNITA and the Soviet Union was openly funding the MPLA. That spring, Cuba began sending military instructors to aid the MPLA, who were soon followed by armed combat troops. A promised unity government between all of Angola's disparate political factions soon came undone underneath the increased pressure of foreign intervention. On August 1, 1975, the nativist and black-led UNITA formally declared war on the nativist and black-led MPLA. The CIA soon initiated a program to have American and European mercenaries fight with one of UNITA's allies, the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA). Fearing a black-led Angola but fearing far more the leftist orientation of the MPLA, the South African government began supporting UNITA in August of 1975. Naturally, this move again increased Soviet aid to MPLA and motivated Cuba to send thousands of more men to Africa. By December 1975 Angola was a fractured country, with independent governments set up in both Luanda and Huambo. The efforts of a senator from Iowa named Dick Clark to frustrate South Africa's apartheid government resulted in the Arms Export Control Act of 1976—the Clark Amendment—which for a while explicitly forbid aid to military groups in Angola.³⁸ This paved the road for the creation of the country of Namibia, but allowed South Africa to play the game of clandestinely supporting the MPLA's enemies when independence negotiations went against them. This policy barely survived the Carter Administration, however, as Ronald Reagan

³⁷ *Angola: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress, 1991), 32

³⁸ *Angola: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress, 1991), 38–39

resumed funding UNITA's divisive efforts in 1981—in 1985, the Clark amendment was finally repealed. Reagan's rationale was his policy of "constructive engagement," which was designed to forestall growing Soviet influence in the region. During this time, both sides in Angola began a series of diplomatic stalemates. Both sides only would come to the peace table when they were negotiating from positions of power; accordingly, peace agreements were systematically disregarded. The Clinton Administration ceased funding of UNITA in 1993, but not after UNITA had gained control of both Angolan oilfields and diamond mines, and had brokered enough deals with Western industrial partners to continue funding the war themselves.³⁹ The conflict really only ended with Savimbi's death in 2002.

By the early 1990s, the war in Angola had earned the infamous sobriquet, "the worst war in the world."⁴⁰ Life expectancy had fallen to forty-five; extended-family networks had broken down; and Angola claimed the highest number of limbless people in the world from landmine attacks.⁴¹ From 1975 to 2002, one-and-a-half million people died as a result of the conflict out of a population of six million people. A generation of education was lost to either emigration or the breakdown of social services.⁴² Although scholars today are trumpeting the birth of a notion of citizenship in the country, most doubt an imminent growth of a middle class due the MPLA's transition into a plutocratic partner to industrialized interests.⁴³

³⁹ Christopher Pycroft, "Angola - 'The Forgotten Tragedy'" *Journal of South African Studies* 20, no. 2 (Jun. 1994): 244 - 256

⁴⁰ Richard Dowden, "Worst war in world claims 1,000 lives per day," *The Independent*, July 9, 1993

⁴¹ Pycroft "Angola - 'The Forgotten Tragedy,'" 242

⁴² David Sogge "Angola; Reinventing Pasts and Futures," *Review of African Political Economy* 38, no. 127 (March 2011), 86

⁴³ For Angola's burgeoning sense of citizenship, see Paulo Coneicao Joao Faria, "The Dawning of Angola's Citizenship Revolution: A Quest for Inclusionary Politics," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013). For Angolan elites gaining control of the political process, see Assis Malaquias "Making War and Lots of Money: The Political Economy of Protracted Conflict in Angola," *Review of African Political Economy* 28, no. 90 (Dec. 2001) and Sogge "Angola; Reinventing Pasts and Futures," 86

Conclusion

From the perspective of a slave, participating in a conspiracy to escape was an integral part of slave rebellion, because the flight was not just from a physical space, but indeed from a psychological prison that defined what you were good for. The decision to escape, then, or the decision to take up arms and provide succor and comfort to those that did, was the completion of that psychological journey—it was finding completion in a new political identity. And this decision did not have to constitute a complete denial of one’s identity as a slave. Indeed, slaves who took the perilous journey over land and across Guyana’s serpentine waterways to Orinoco knew that the Spanish also engaged in slavery. In this case, people were still choosing a life of slavery, but one that would they thought might be more secure and comfortable than the hard-scrabble refugee life of a jungle maroon. And the vastly disproportionate number of slaves who escaped from Dutch-to-Spanish rather than Spanish-to-Dutch territories suggests that it was well known among slaves that the Spanish de-emphasis on plantation agriculture and their desire to convert runaway slaves would translate into a much-less-brutal slave experience.⁴⁴ Indeed, one could make the comparison that Guianese slaves could have seen Orinoco in much the same way that antebellum American slaves idealized “the North,” as a place that, while not perfect, might allow them to live at least a decent life. King Carlos’ “Zimmerman telegram” strongly supports this notion of Orinoco as a “slave-friendly” paradise, particularly his intention to extend property rights to rebels.

Utilizing the theoretical framework of the imperial mindset as a pathology, the entire 1763 Rebellion could be seen in an entirely different light. Rather than simply an African-led rebellion against Dutch masters, it can be seen as more of an enduring conflict in which African slaves who wanted to rebel or escape were given comfort and support by Spanish agents to

⁴⁴ Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Guyana*, 139.

foment politically violent disruption in the Dutch territories. Just as the Germans surmised that an increase in lands would be a sufficient motivator for Mexicans to risk their lives for the German cause, Carlos added the motivators of “life, liberty, and lands” to the rebel African slaves’ cause—if only they would help him overcome his accursed enemies. In turn, the Caribs were the main agents of a slave-recapturing economy administered by the Dutch.

Just as Carlos strove for dominance in Western Europe by strategizing in the Guianas, U.S. and Russian leaders strove for world dominance partly by supporting distinct military factions in Angola. The CIA even sent in agents to oversee their training, just as Carlos had intended to “send Spaniards [from Orinoco] with good wits and courage, so that they may direct and head [slaves] in their raids.” Capitalist and communist forces simply would not allow one polity to fall to the other side without having given every effort to forestall it—no matter what the cost in lives or potential legacies. If we accept the metaphor of the imperial mindset as a pathology, perhaps it would be instructive to extend it to include the concept of a pathogen that can infect the mindsets of others. Compounding the tragedy of the Angolan case study is the disturbing fact that native autocrats adopted (were infected by?) the pathology of imperialism when they themselves again plunged Angola into war. Although scholars might want to assign blame to the international community for actions taken by postcolonial leaders, these were native Africans who made these choices in the interests of their constituencies.⁴⁵

Reagan’s “constructive engagement” was yet another in a long line of rhetorical devices used to justify imperialist aggression. Since (ostensibly) black African lives were more politically economical than (ostensibly) white American ones, the ten billion dollars Reagan

⁴⁵ Pycroft “Angola - ‘The Forgotten Tragedy’” Pycroft’s main argument is the West’s external culpability. For the African postcolonial elite’s adoption of Western ideals, see Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth (Les Damnés de la Terre)* (New York: Grove Press, 1961) first.

funneled into UNITA coffers seamlessly fits the parameters we have set for imperial pathology. And when Jonas Savimbi decided to reject the Bicesse Accords on grounds that the elections they sanctioned were fraudulent, he was in fact adopting a tried-and-true tactic of this rationale. In this case, however, African leaders had long since appropriated and inserted the rhetoric of racism into their own ethnic conflicts. With the justification racism gives amoral social policies, people like Savimbi made his allegiance to his Ovimbundu supporters—his African “race”—the justification for the millions more who would go on to suffer. According to Assis Malaquias and David Sogge, at the end, the leading economic movers in Angola were not even really interested in resolving the conflict between the MPLA and the UNITA anymore. They had both long since made deals with corporatist interests over oil and diamond rights, and the political capital generated by the decades-old conflict became a useful tool in the new African plutocracy.

We see here the spread of the imperialist pathogen—its influence is not limited to Europeans, but to all men (yes, always men) who deal in the coalescing of power. The generations-long struggle for power in Western Europe provided all the justification rulers like Carlos, Zimmermann, and their Cold War progeny needed to use sovereign peoples as proxies. In a sense, the fight for Western supremacy became its own self-sustaining justification to implement ethically questionable policies even as the ethics and morals of Western civilization were extolled to these subject peoples; this could be considered to be at the very least a substantively irrational proposition, psychologically. But this proposition does not seem irrational to the imperialist mind because the pathogen elides the connection between ethics and civilization. One might say that it was a serendipitous fluke that the beginning of the Age of Discovery saw the rise of the global economy at the same time as it saw the ideological upheavals of the Protestant Reformation—in an orderly universe, perhaps, those social upheavals

would have occurred sequentially. But in this one, religion combined with economic revolution in permutations that would lead some to use the philosophy of racism to excuse the furthering of economic goals. This should not be seen as a condemnation of the people involved, but the flawed logic of the philosophy driving them, and an inquiry as to why they are still the driving vectors of geopolitical development. Sometimes, perhaps, while mired in the flush of technological progress, or stuck in the fluster of superstition and sociological anxiety, new worlds are simply born ugly and screaming into the light. And it is only in the ways that we nurture them over the long term that our true natures can really be revealed.