
The first document below is a letter which a royal magistrate addressed to the governor of Bahia giving an account of a slave rebellion on a large sugar plantation near Ilheus in what is now southern Bahia. This letter goes on to tell of the seizure of the rebels which followed a violent engagement, the sale of most of them to distant Maranhao, and the imprisonment of their leader, the cabra Gregorio Luis, who was kept in a jail in Salvador for some sixteen years prior to the date of the magistrate's letter. Far more remarkable than this letter, however, is the second document, a peace proposal which the rebels drew up and sent to their master prior to their seizure to inform him of the conditions under which they would return to work. Written probably by Gregorio Luis, the “most astute” among the rebels, these proposals tell us much about slavery from the point of view of its victims: the conditions under which they labored and the amount of work required of them, both men and women, their clothing, their sources of food, the activities that brought them income, their ethnic conflicts, their pleasures and pastimes, and much more. As Professor Schwartz suggests, the circumstances under which this document was written and the proposals it contains make it extraordinary and perhaps unique in the annals of Brazilian slavery. Source: Stuart B. Schwartz, “resistance and Accommodation in Eighteenth-Century Brazil: the Slaves' View of Slavery,” Hispanic American Historical Review 57 (1977), 69-81. Thanks to Professor Richard Slatta for permission to reproduce this translation and introduction from his web site.

[Document 1] The Royal Magistrate's Letter

Illustrious and most Excellent Sir:

The Supplicant Gregorio Luis, a cabra, finds himself a prisoner in the jail of this High Court where he was sent by his master, Captain Manoel da Silva Ferreria, resident on his engenho called Santana in the district of the Town of Ilheus; there coming at the same time with him, as I remember, some fifteen or sixteen other slaves. These were sent to the merchant Jose da Silva Maia, his commercial agent, so that he could sell them in Maranhao while the Supplicant came with the recommendation that he be held in prison while the Court of that district prepared the charges so that he could be given exemplary punishment. Taking a preliminary investigation of the Supplicant, I have determined the following facts. The above-mentioned Manoel da Silva Ferreria being master and owner of the aforesaid engenho with three hundred slaves, including some of the Mina nation, discovered the majority of them in rebellion refusing to recognize their subordination to their master. And, the principal leader of this disorder was the Supplicant who began to incite among them the partisan spirit against their master and against the Sugar Master.

The Suppliant was able with a few of his followers to kill the latter and until now none know where they buried him. Taking control of part of the engenho's equipment, they fled to the forest refusing not only to give their service or to obey their master, but even placing him in fear that
they would cruelly take his life. For this reason the *engenho* has remained inactive for two years with such notable damage that its decadence is dated from that time forward, and, moreover, these damages added to he danger that the rest of the slaves might follow the terrible example of those in rebellion. Thus the majority of the slaves persisted divided into errant and vagabond bands throughout the territory of the *engeno*, so absolute and fearless that the consternation and fright of their master increased in consideration that he might one day fall victim to some disaster.

Matters being in this situation, the rebels sent emissaries to their Master with a proposal of capitulation contained in the enclosed copy [see next document] to which he showed them that he acceded: some came and others remained. The Supplicant as the most astute was able to extort from him a letter of Manumission which was granted at the time without the intention that it have any validity, at the same time he [the Supplicant] sought the District Judge who entering the *engenho* with eighty-five armed men sought out the house of his Master: The latter who could not now confide in the principal leaders of that uprising took advantage of a stratagem of sending the Suppliant Gregorio and fifteen others with a false letter to the Captain Major of the militia, Joao da Silva Santos, who was in the Vila of Belmonte, telling that they would receive from him some cattle and manioc flour for the *engenho*. Arriving at the said Vila all were taken prisoner with handcuffs despite the great resistance that they made almost to the point of much bloodshed. They were finally conducted to the jail of this High Court as I have said, that is, the Supplicant as the prime mover to be held until his charges were seen and the others with orders to the aforementioned merchant to be sold to Maranhao as they were.

Twice there had been required from this court an order to be sent the investigation or any other charges against the Supplicant and until now they have not arrived.

I must also tell Your Excellency that the Master of the said *engenho* has on repeated occasions recommended with the greatest insistence that the Supplicant not be relased from prison except by a sentence that exiles him far away because if he is freed he will unfailingly return to the *engenho* to incite new disorders, that may be irreparable.

That which is reported here seems to me enough to give Your Excellency a sufficient idea concerning the Supplicant and the reasons for his imprisonment. God Protect Your Excellency.
Claudio Jose Pereira da Costa

[Document 2] The Slaves' Proposals for Peace

TREATY PROPOSED TO MANOEL DA SILVA FERREIRA BY HIS SLAVES DURING THE TIME THAT THEY REMAINED IN REVOLT

  My Lord, we want peace and we do not want war; if My Lord also wants our peace it must be in this manner, if he wishes to agree to that which we want.
In each week you must give us the days of Friday and Saturday to work for ourselves not subtracting any of these because they are Saint's days.

To enable us to live you must give us casting nets and canoes.

You are not to oblige us to fish in the tidal pools nor to gather shellfish, and when you wish to gather shellfish send your Mina blacks.

Make a large boat so that when it goes to Bahia we can place our cargoes aboard and not pay freightage.

In the planting of manioc we wish the men to have a daily quota of two and one half hands [mao, a measurement of quantity still used in backland Brazil] nd the women, two hands.

The daily quota of manioc flour must be of five level alqueires [about thirteen liters to an alqueire], placing enough harvesters so that these can serve to hang up the coverings.

The daily quota of sugar cane must be of five hands rather than six and of ten canes in each bundle.

On the boat you must put four poles, and none for the rudder, and the one at the rudder works hard for us.

The wood that is sawed with a handsaw must have three men below and one above.

The measures of firewood must be as was practiced here, for each measure a woodcutter and a woman as the wood carrier.

The present overseers we do not want, choose others with our approval.

At the milling rollers there must be four women to feed in the cane, two pulleys, and a carcanha [calcanha: a woman who swept the engenho and did other chores].

At each cauldron there must be one who tends the fire and in each series of kettles the same, and on Saturday there must be without fail work stoppage in the mill.

The sailors who go in the launch besides the baize shirt that they are given must also have a jacket of baize and all the necessary clothing.

We will go to work the cane field of Jabiru this time and then it must remain as pasture for we cannot cut cane in a swamp.

We shall be able to plant our rice wherever we wish, and in any marsh, without asking permission for this, and each person can cut jacaranda or any other wood without having to account for this.
Accepting all the above articles and allowing us to remain always in possession of the hardware, we are ready to serve you as before because we do not wish to continue the bad customs of the other engenhos.

We shall be able to play, relax, and sing any time we wish without your hindrance nor will permission be needed.