

Student Information Sheet:

Palmares and the Underground Railroad

BRAZIL

Throughout Brazil, communities of Africans who claimed their freedom by escaping to new, unoccupied land were called Quilombos (ki-LOM-bos). Palmares was the most famous quilombo formed in 1605 and lasted until 1694. It was an independent, self-sustaining community or settlement; the land and the necessities of life were shared by the inhabitants.



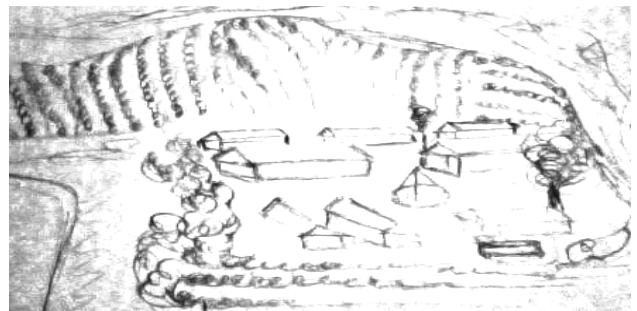
Palmares was located about 420 miles northeast of Salvador, Bahia in Alagoas state. Palmares was a federation of several free communities under one ruler. This community had: 200 buildings, a church, four smithies, a council house, large orchards and tilled fields. The motto of Palmares was: "Whoever comes for the love of liberty, stays."

By the 1690s it had a population of over 20,000 and was ruled by Ganga Zumba, who designated landholdings, appointed officials and lived in a royal residence. After a short-lived peace treaty between Ganga Zumba and the Portuguese in 1676, six Portuguese expeditions tried to conquer Palmares and failed.

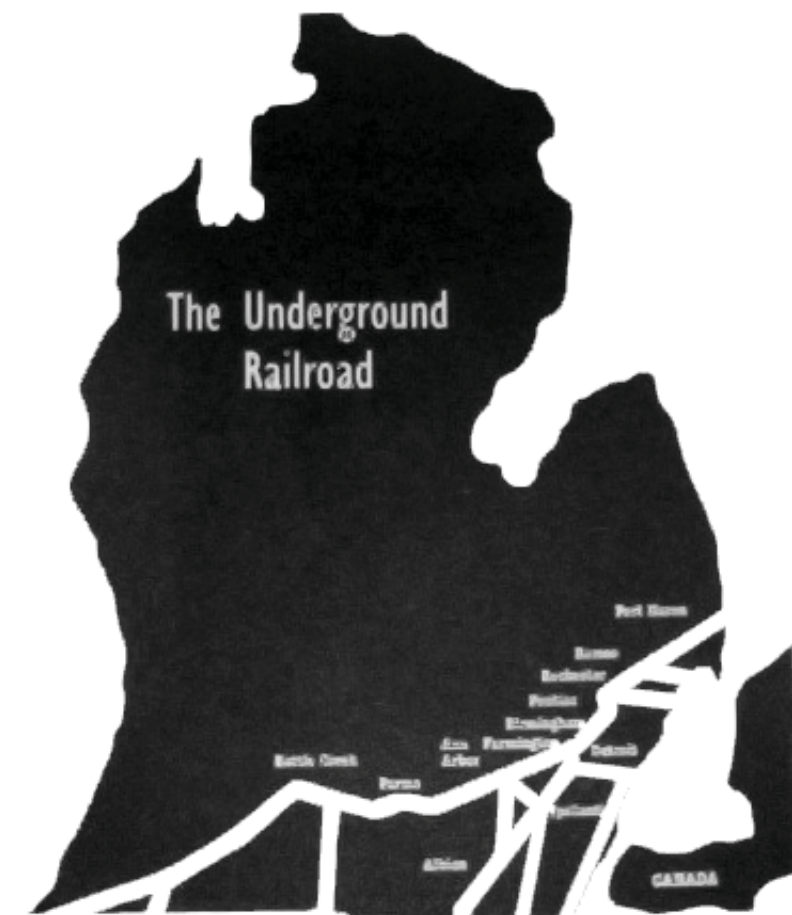
It was finally conquered in 1695. Palmares' last leader, Zumbi, who did not accept the 1676 treaty, escaped but was killed two years later. Today he is celebrated as a hero who fought for the freedom of his people.

U.S

Fort Mose, two miles north of St. Augustine, Florida, is a forerunner of the Underground Railroad. It began decades before abolitionism became organized and influential. The inhabitants of Ft. Mose were captive Africans who escaped from South Carolina and Georgia in 1687.



In the 1700s, it became the earliest legally sanctioned free black community in the United States. The Spanish Governor of Florida established Fort Mose in 1738 but left it in 1740 and reestablished the fort at a nearby site in 1752. There were at least 50 other maroon communities or self-liberated African settlements active in the South between 1672 and 1864.



Courtesy of the Detroit Historical Museum

DETROIT AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Detroit was a major “station” on the Underground Railroad and one of the final U.S. terminals for escaped enslaved people of African descent entering Canada. Locations in the city were vital to the operation of this secret network and included the work of free Africans, former enslaved Africans and abolitionists.

One of the most famous sites in Detroit is the Second Baptist Church. This church served as a stop on the Underground Railroad from 1836 to 1865 and helped thousands of escaped Africans and their descendants make their way to Canada.

ABOLITIONISTS

Abolitionists worked to end enslavement and protect the freedom of all people. Some worked to affect institutional change, as well as often offering their own homes and churches to be used as stations on the Underground Railroad. Levi Coffin was born in 1796 to a Quaker abolitionist in North Carolina. His efforts in Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio enabled over three thousand enslaved Africans escape to freedom.



Levi Coffin by Barbara Cervenka

THINK ABOUT...

1. In what ways do you exercise your freedom? How do you protect the freedom of others?
2. Imagine building your own self-sustaining community, what systems would you create?

PLAN A TOUR

Go on a walking tour of the people and places that were important to the Underground Railroad in downtown Detroit. Follow the provided Detroit Underground Railroad Site List, and create your own walking tour.