

Quilombos and Cangaceiros

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- describe the concept of “disloyal opposition.”
 - explain reasons why some individuals would feel alienated from the established system.
 - evaluate the impact of Palmares and the quilombos upon Brazilian history and mythology.
 - evaluate the impact of Lampião and Maria Bonita upon Brazilian history and mythology.
-

Materials

- Student Handout: **Zumbi and Palmares**
 - Student Handout: **Lampião and Maria Bonita**
-

Activities

1. Write the terms “republican” and “democrat” on the chalkboard.
 - a. Review with the class the results of the last local, state, and/or national election, and circle the party that won election.
 - b. Ask students to describe what the “losing” party did after the election. Did they erect barricades in the street? Did they riot or threaten to overthrow the government?
 - c. Explain that in democratic systems, political opposition to the party in power generally takes on the form of what is called the “loyal opposition.”
 - d. Emphasize that in this case, people are loyal to the system of government and society itself and can agree to work within the system to promote change.
 2. Write the terms “exclusive” and “disloyal opposition” on the chalkboard.
 - a. Explain that exclusive systems shut out large sections of society and promote inequality and that people who want change are not permitted to give voice to their concerns.
 - b. Ask students to place themselves in such a position. What if you were treated unequally in a society that doesn’t allow for or protect human rights? What would you do?
 - c. Explain that some people choose reject the system itself and to work outside it. These people are called the “disloyal opposition” because they view the system itself as being invalid and refuse to follow its rules.
-

Continued on next page

**Activities
(continued)**

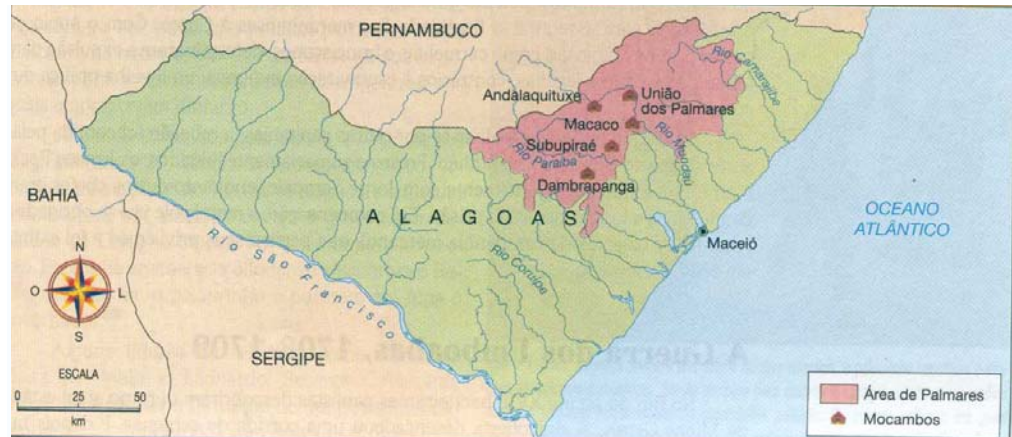
3. Distribute the student handout entitled **Zumbi and Palmares**.
 - a. Direct students to read the sections: “The Quilombos” and “Palmares.”
 - b. Ask students to explain why the American Underground Railroad and the Brazilian quilombos were both forms of “disloyal opposition.”
 - c. Ask students to carefully examine the nature of the *mocambos*. What was uniquely African about them?
 - d. Direct students to examine the size and nature of Palmares. What had the former slaves succeeded in creating here? If a community is of such a size, what does it indicate about its stability and effectiveness in self-government?
 4. Direct students to read the next two section entitled “Zumbi” and “The Aftermath.”
 - a. Ask students to explain the motivation of the Portuguese in desiring to conquer Palmares. Why would they see Palmares as a threat?
 - b. Ask students to explain why Afro-Brazilians would view Zumbi and the people of Palmares as heroes? What do they represent?
 5. Distribute the student handout entitled **Lampião and Maria Bonita**.
 - a. Direct students to read the first section: “Cangaço.”
 - b. Ask students to explain why the *cangaceiros* might be considered a form of “disloyal opposition.”
 - c. Ask students to describe the fundamental differences between the *cangaceiros* and the people of Palmares. What was the motivation of each for turning against the system? What form did their rejection take?
 6. Direct students to read the sections entitled “Lampião” and “Hero or Criminal?”
 - a. Ask students to answer the question posed by the handout. Would they consider Lampião a hero or criminal? Why?
 - b. Direct students to read the final sections: “The End” and “In Popular Culture.”
 - c. Ask students to hypothesize why Lampião and Maria Bonita might be seen by some people as folk heroes.
 7. Concluding activity
Direct students to write a reflective essay answering the following question: “Both Zumbi and Lampião rejected the unequal systems they faced, but which was the more heroic? Why?”
-

Zumbi and Palmares

The Quilombos

“No day ever dawns for the slave, nor is it looked for. To the slave it is all night, all night forever.” So said a freed African-American in the time period before the American Civil War. To escape from this condition, many slaves in the United States used the Underground Railroad to escape from the slaveholding South and to find freedom in the Northern States or in Canada. There was no underground Railroad, as such, in Brazil, but that doesn't mean that slaves in Brazil did not also try to escape. As a matter of fact, their efforts to escape the bonds of slavery resulted in the creation of a rather unique institution – the *quilombo*.

As early as 1602, Portuguese settlers complained to the government that their slaves were running away into this inaccessible mountainous region just beyond the coastal settlements. In this mountainous region, the former slaves established African village-style communities termed *mocambos*. The Portuguese were unable to dislodge these communities, which came to symbolize slave resistance. The most famous of these communities was Palmares, which covered an area of 150 area of square kilometers.



Palmares

During the Dutch occupation of Brazil (1630 – 1654) thousands of slaves escaped and went to Palmares. By the 1640, many of the *mocambos* had consolidated into larger entities or *quilombos* ruled by "kings". Dutch descriptions spoke of two larger consolidated entities, "Great Palmares" and "Little Palmares". In each of these units there was a large central town that was fortified and held 5-6,000 people, and the surrounding hills and valleys were filled with many more *mocambos* of 50 to 100 people. A description of the visit of Johan Blaer to one of the larger *mocambos* in 1645 (which had been abandoned) revealed that there were 220 buildings in the community, including a church, four smithies, and a council house. At its height, it hosted a population of over 30,000 free African men, women and children.

Continued on next page

Zumbi



After the Dutch were expelled in 1654, the Portuguese began organizing expeditions against Palmares. They sent more than twenty punitive expeditions, but after a particularly devastating attack in 1676-7, Ganga Zumba, the leader of Palmares, and the Governor of Pernambuco agreed to peace terms which included the return all slaves that had not been born in Palmares.

The armistice, however, was not acceptable to everyone in the *quilombos*. Zumbi, a nephew of Ganga Zumba, wanted to continue fighting the against the Portuguese and the slave system. With the death of Ganga Zumba – who might have been poisoned - Zumbi assumed the power, and reignited hostilities.

From 1680 to 1694, the Portuguese and Zumbi waged an almost constant war, of varying intensity. Determined to end the resistance of Palmares, the Portuguese organized a heavily armed expedition that included the latest artillery of the time. The intensity of the assault finally overwhelmed the central settlement.

Zumbi, although wounded, escaped and attempted to continue the fight. About a year and a half later, on November 20, 1695, he was finally captured and executed. His head was transported to Recife and put on public display as proof of his demise and to contradict the legend among African slaves that he was immortal.

The Aftermath



Although the defeat of Palmares and the death of Zumbi marked the end of an era, it was not the end of slave resistance. People resided in the quilombos for nearly a hundred years. For example, in 1730 the governor of Minas Gerais, Lourenço de Almeida, wrote to the Portuguese king complaining of the former slaves who would not abide by Portuguese laws.

Zumbi became a symbol of Afro-Brazilian resistance. Today, the date of his death, November 20th, has special meaning for Afro-Brazilians, who honor Zumbi as a hero, freedom fighter and a symbol of freedom.

Sources

Brasil: História e Sociedade. Francisco M.P. Teixeira. Editora Ática. São Paulo. 2000.

Lampião and Maria Bonita

Cangaço



Cangaço is the name given to a form of "social banditry" in the Brazilian Nordeste in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This region of Brazil is known for its aridness and hardships. It is a land of little water, much cactus and scrub vegetation, not unlike that of the American Southwest. Although one of the oldest areas of Brazil, it has traditionally been one of the most backward. Roads were cattle trails and telegraph lines almost non-existent. Few people received anything beyond a rudimentary education. Local society was ruled by large landholders and political bosses, often one and the same. In reaction against the domination of the land owners, the government and systemic poverty, many men and women decided to become nomad bandits, roaming the *sertão* (backlands) looking for money, food, and revenge. They became known as *cangaceiros* and were supported by the poor people of the society, who fed them and protected them against the policemen sent by the government to stop them.

One of the most common reasons why young people joined the *cangaço* was to avenge the honor of the family. This was the case of Jesuíno Brilhante, a famous *cangaceiro* from Rio Grande do Norte, as well as Sinhô Pereira, who joined the *cangaço* to avenge the murder of his brother in the countryside of Pernambuco.

Lampião



The most famous *cangaceiro* of them all, the one who is often associated with the whole history of the *cangaço*, was a man named Virgulino Ferreira da Silva - better known as *Lampião* ("Oil Lamp"). He was born in 1897 in the Northeastern state of Pernambuco. As he grew up, he and his family got entangled in the ever-present local feuds.

The family somehow ended up of the bad side of the local police, and in a raid on his home in 1919, Virgulino's father was killed, and he fled with others into the backlands. Virgulino sought vengeance and proved to be extremely violent in doing so. At age 25, Virgulino had become *Lampião*, the scourge of the backlands and killer of police and soldiers, whom he always called *macacos* (monkeys).

For the next 15 years he and his band of *cangaceiros* would never be far from the headlines of newspapers throughout Brazil. His band rarely totaled more than 40 men, but he would fight battles against up to 200 militia or special police. He knew the country side, he had spies, he had friends, and the local population often aided the band, although quite often reluctantly. Most people simply wanted to be left alone. The *cangaceiros* also had women in their band; they dressed like *cangaceiros* and participated in many of their actions. The most famous was Maria Bonita (Pretty Mary), *Lampião*'s companion until death.

Hero or Criminal?



Lampião was not a revolutionary, he was a bandit. His raids over a decade and a half took him into seven different states. Those who opposed him could lose everything, including their lives. In the event of betrayal or talking to the police, the *cangaceiros* were merciless. On the other hand, if Lampião and company came to town, and he had no reason to be mad at you, and you had nothing he wanted, quite often he would arrange a party with music and plenty of *cachaça* (a form of alcohol).

Lampião would wipe out whole households of enemies at times. He would assault small towns and cities alike, killing police, asking local merchants for "contributions", seizing any goods he could carry off and often distributing those which he could not to the local population.

The End

In July of 1938, Lampião and his band were betrayed by one of his supporters and were ambushed in one of his hideouts. 50 soldiers armed with machine guns crept up and surprised an equal number of *cangaceiros*. About forty bandits managed to escape, but the leaders were clearly visible and were targeted in the first shots. Lampião and Maria Bonita were among the dozen bodies left dead after 20 minutes of battle. To insure that the news of Lampião's demise would be believed, the soldiers took the heads of the captives to Salvador, where they remained on display for over 30 years. Lampião's death signaled the end of an era.

In Popular culture



Over the years, Lampião and Maria Bonita have become the subjects of numerous folk stories, books, popular pamphlets, songs, movies, and a number of TV soap operas. They have all the elements of drama, passion, and violence typical of "Wild West" stories. Yet, the fact remains that Lampião was the most notorious of the social bandits that roamed the countryside.

Their exploits have taken on the tone of myth. To many people, he was a folk hero, a kind of Robin Hood who defied the dominant planter aristocracy of the region, the so-called *colonels*. Lampião has become one of the most representative icons of Brazil. His image is still seen everywhere, particularly in the *Nordeste*.

Sources

- Cangaceiros e Caubóis. *Continente*. Anno IV. N° 47. Recife, Pernambuco. Junho 2006.
 - Lampião (www.brazilbrazil.com/lampiao.html)
-