

PEDRO MIGUEL DE ALMEIDA PORTUGAL (1688–1756)
LETTER TO KING JOÃO V (1719)

. . . last year I informed Your Majesty of the unrestrained life style of the blacks in this mining region, especially the runaways who, gathered together in *quilombos*, dare to commit all kinds of offenses without fear of punishment. I also called Your Majesty's attention to the great importance of this question, because it seemed to be reasonably well founded that the blacks might possibly carry out operations similar to those of Palmares in Pernambuco, encouraged by their large numbers and the foolhardy attitudes of their masters. Not only do the latter trust them with all kinds of weapons; they also conceal their acts of insolence and their crimes . . . to avoid the risk of losing them . . . The harm caused by this situation seems without remedy . . .

With the passage of time my fears have been verified . . . Having entered into a conspiracy to rebel against the whites which involved most of the blacks of these mines, they attempted to establish contacts with one another by means of various secret agents who went from one place to another over a vast area attempting to arrange a general revolt. They had decided that their first attacks would take place on Maundy Thursday of this year. With all the white men occupied in the churches, they reasoned, they would have time to break into their houses and attack the whites, pitilessly exterminating them. A few days before Holy Week those blacks began to quarrel among themselves, because it was the intention of one nation to impose its rule upon the rest, and the secret was therefore revealed in the Rio das Mortes district, where, along with news of the revolt, it was learned that the blacks of that district had named for themselves a king, a prince, and military leaders. I had already decided that this was probably some black nonsense, when another message arrived from a place called Furquim . . . and so it began to be clear to me that this was indeed a very serious situation.

I immediately decreed the necessary preventive measures, including the arrest of all the suspended blacks in the several places. And conscious of the fact that on the hill of Ouro Preto there were suspicious circumstances suggesting that the blacks who lived there were also involved in the conspiracy . . . I went to Vila Rica and ordered two companies of soldiers to ascend the hill to hunt for weapons . . . I then decreed a strict ban on the possession by blacks of weapons of every kind, at the same time imposing rigorous punishments upon them and upon their masters.

Since all these preventive measures were taken before the date determined by the blacks for their first attacks, and since many guilty black men and women were imprisoned, and other punished, the problem ceased to exist. The sedition was extinguished, and the country returned to its former tranquility. However, since we cannot prevent the remaining blacks from thinking, and cannot deprive them of their natural desire for freedom; and since we cannot, merely because of this desire, eliminate all of them, they being necessary for our existence here, it must be concluded that this country will always be subjected to this problem.

Taken from Pedro de Almeida, "Slaves of Minas Gerais Plot Revolt (1719)," in *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*, ed. Robert Edgar Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 394–397.