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### Presentation on Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* Day 2

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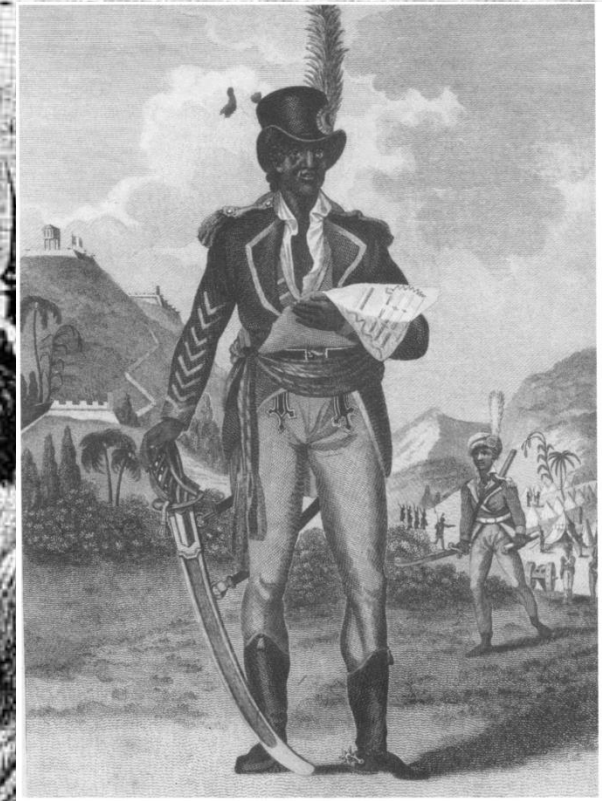
Marlon James,  
*The Book of Night Women*  
Day 2

# Today

- Figure of Maroon and volatility in world of novel
- Jamaica as varied community (both historically and in novel)
  - Lilith's position in these hierarchies
- Obeah, both historically and depicted in novel
- Lilith parentage (Wilkins) attraction to Humphrey, ties of all this to literacy.

“Jamaica is about as stable as gunpowder in a kitchen”  
(139)

- Maroons—mentioned by James on 78-79—figures of resistance and potential volatility in Jamaica and throughout the Atlantic slave world
- “One Maroon [...] have machete in one hand and spear in the other. Is like the whole estate stop when them Maroons come back with Tantalus” (79)
- James uses the Maroons to contribute to his depiction of Jamaica as volatile



Toissant L'Overture depicted as Maroon

# Kathleen Wilson:

- Eighteenth-century Jamaica was an island of transculture [...] a place where the syncretic creation of culture was forged from the destruction of indigenous plants, inhabitants, and ways of life and the imposition of extractive forced labor regimes, and where no one could claim to "belong." English, Scottish, Irish, and Jewish; black, white, and colored; slave, servant, and free; Creole and "new" were just a few of the categories through which residents attempted to sort out their status and identity.
- Wilson also notes that hierarchies of Africans intensely mapped (just as James describes on 49 and elsewhere)
- Off the top of your head: in what ways does James reproduce this world?



# Obeah

- Often “used” for personal gain, as with Lilith and Andromeda
- Historically perceived by British to be dangerous
- Obeah men involved in all slave revolts in Jamaica
- Obeah men leaders of community
- James, of course, puts a twist on this by making the Obeah practitioners women



# Obeah

- 1816--law recognizing danger present from revolt and Obeah:
  - "if there shall be found in the possession of any slave any poisonous drugs, pounded glass, parrot's beaks, dog's teeth, alligator's teeth, or other materials notoriously used in the practice of Obeah or witchcraft, such slave upon conviction, shall be liable to suffer transportation from the island [deportation]."

# Obeah

- Joseph Williams "a serious source of danger to the peace of the colony was recognized to be ever present in the assemblies of slaves where the old religious tribal dances were openly accompanied by drumming which aroused the fanaticism of Africans to such a degree as to endanger a general uprising."





# In groups

- Think of an example where James describes Obeah.
- First, why do you think James treats the practice as real and not superstition?
- How does he position Obeah in relation to the colonizers? (Why, for example, is it such a source of debate among Humphrey, Quinn, and Roget on pages 112-116?)

# Lilith memory of book in connection to Humphrey

- James presents a complicated situation in terms of Lilith's birth and attraction to Humphrey.
- Why do you think he chooses to make her the daughter of Wilkins and attracted to Humphrey? (Why make all the Night Women half white?)
- Finally, why tie all that to literacy?