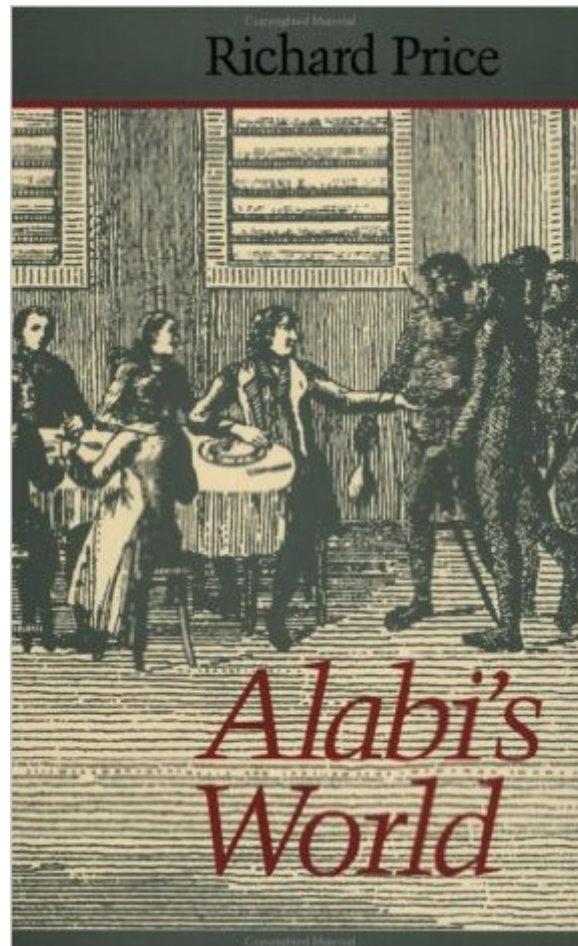


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Alabi's World (Johns Hopkins Studies In Atlantic History And Culture)



Synopsis

In the early 18th century, the Dutch colony of Suriname was the envy of all others in the Americas. There, seven hundred Europeans lived off the labor of over four thousand enslaved Africans. Owned by men hell-bent for quick prosperity, the rich plantations on the Suriname river became known for their heights of planter comfort and opulence and for their depths of slave misery. Slaves who tried to escape were hunted by the planter militia. If found they were publicly tortured. (A common punishment was for the Achilles tendon to be removed for a first offense, the right leg amputated for a second.) Resisting this cruelty first in small numbers, then in an ever increasing torrent, slaves began to form outlaw communities until nearly one out of every ten Africans in Suriname was helping to build rebel villages in the jungle. *Alabi's World* relates the history of a nation founded by escaped slaves deep in the Latin American rain forest. It tells of the black men and women's bloody battles for independence, their uneasy truce with the colonial government, and the attempt of their great leader, Alabi, to reconcile his people with white law and a white God. In a unique historical experiment, Richard Price presents this history by weaving together four voices: the vivid historical accounts related by the slaves' descendants, largely those of Alabi's own villagers, the Saramaka; the reports of the often exasperated colonial officials sent to control the slave communities; the otherworldly diaries of the German Moravian missionaries determined to convert the heathen masses; and the historian's own, mediating voice. The Saramaka voices in these pages recall a world of powerful spirits called *obia's* and renowned heroes, great celebrations and fierce blood-feuds. They also recall, with unconcealed relish, successes in confounding the colonial officials and in bending the treaty to the benefit of their own people. From the opposite side of the negotiations, the colonial Postholders speak of the futility of trying to hold the village leaders to their vow to return any further runaway slaves. Equally frustrated, the Moravian missionaries describe the rigors of their proselytising efforts in the black villages places of licentiousness and idol-worship that seemed to be "a foretaste of what hell must be like." Among their only zealous converts was Alabi, who stood nearly alone in his attempts to bridge the cultural gap between black and white defiantly working to lead his people on the path toward harmony with their former enemies. From the confluence of these voices set throughout the book in four different typefaces Price creates a fully nuanced portrait of the collision of cultures. It is a confrontation, he suggests, that was enacted thousands of times across the slaveholding Americas as white men strained to suppress black culture and blacks resisted determined to preserve their heritage and beliefs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Alabi's World" is thorough (some note about that, later), captivating, and educational. To go to the cliché: "I have not been able to put the book down." I must qualify this by saying that my roots are from Suriname and therefore I have much interest in the material because of my familiarity with the settings. However, anyone interested in colonial history, African history as it pertains to the Western Hemisphere (slavery, slave rebellion, African customs of Maroons), will be thoroughly enlightened by the accounts charted in this book from the 4 perspectives listed above. Richard Price has painstakingly arranged his research in such a matter that you get 4 different perspectives of life in Saramaka (Maroon colony located in the interior of Suriname): German Moravian (religious sect), Dutch Colonist, Saramaka, and his own. It is neatly arranged so that the information flows like a captivating story in which you follow these historical characters and get caught up in their lives, motivations, changes... Because he has made one character the focal point, you get a more centralized view of what it was like in 18th century colonial Suriname and you can take away more detail from these individualized accounts. I have discovered a great source for Maroon history in Suriname and will be seeking out all of Richard Price's titles to get the complete story about the Maroons.

I ordered this book on 11/02/2011 and got it in less than a week. It is a used book but the condition was as good as the vendor stated. I am extremely satisfied with the purchase and would heartily recommend this vendor.

Weird. One part anthropology, one part primary sources, and a little part history. Price basically gives an odd biography of Alabi, a Saramacca, a Maroon society in the forests of Suriname. The problem I have is his reliance on oral traditions of present-day Saramacca, which perhaps skews the record, though, it should be said, that contemporary Dutch written records might be skewed themselves. Also, like most anthropologists, he harbors nothing but ill-will and hatred for Christianity and its missionaries (in this case Moravians). This is important because Alabi was a Christian, though he ruled over an animistic people. Hmm. Still, it is rather interesting, however weird it may be, as it reads like a good historical novel.

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