

# The 1763 Rebellion in Berbice

## Introduction:

Berbice was a Dutch colony on the South American mainland. From 1733-1762 there were several small slave uprisings but a major one occurred the following year in 1763.

## Causes

The main motive was to gain their freedom but others were:

- Resentment at the ill-treatment by the managers or overseers.
- Lack of provisions- Berbice Association economized on the imports of foodstuffs, the planters provided little or no provision grounds and this led slaves being malnourished.

The rebellion started on February 23, 1763 on plantation Magdalenbery on the Canje River and soon spread to the estates of Berbice. The slaves outnumbered the planters by eleven to one so this enabled them to control the province for over a year. Within two weeks other rebels joined the revolt. They moved from one plantation to the other murdering some whites, imprisoning others and driving away refugees.

**March 1763:** **Kofi** nominates himself as Governor of Berbice and elects **Accraas** second in command. Troops numbering one hundred arrived. They were sent to some many areas that they in turn were outnumbered.

**April 1763:** the troops obtained the help of the native Indians. They attacked the Canje rebels, some were killed while others escaped within an inch of their lives. These continued to attack plantation for food, arms and supplies.

**July 1763:** Some of the troops from Surinam mutinied. They were discouraged by the difficulty of locating the rebels in the dense forest.

**July-November:** The Indians continued to fight the rebels Meanwhile the Governor of Berbice-Van Hoogenheim was playing a game of "delay and conquer" with the leader of the rebellion Kofi (Cuffee).

Kofi employing diplomatic tactics had written to Hoogenheim asking him to

officially recognize the division of Berbice-with the blacks occupying the interiors. Hoogenheim said he would send letters of request to Holland for the king there to decide. What he was really doing was to 'stall' Kofi until reinforcement from Europe arrived.

His tactics worked even better than he could have hoped. Kofi's decision to wait on and trust the Governor resulted in disunity among his followers. Some believed in Kofi's diplomatic way, others believed that it was a trick and wanted to continue fighting. The rebel group then split into two. Atta became a second Governor.

During the struggle between Kofi and Atta many of Kofi's supporters were killed. Kofi unable to bear the burden of defeat, committed suicide (shot himself). Accra- his second in command was captured by Atta, but he later escaped and offered to hunt and disclose the rebels 'hiding place in exchange for his freedom. He managed to capture Atta and from there, the rebels began to scatter. (January 1764) November 1763: European troops arrived. More arrived December. (600)

### **Results**

The rebellion was largely unsuccessful. It did not secure the freedom of the slaves or the rebels. Half of the slave population was killed and more than half of the white population was either killed or fled the country in fear of losing their lives.