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The Betrayal of an Alliance:
The Miskito and the British, 1687-1894

by

Daniel R. J. Burnell

A THESIS

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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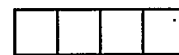
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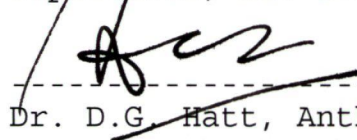


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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Betrayal of an Alliance: The Miskito and the British, 1687-1894" submitted by Daniel R. J. Burnell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

From 1687 to 1894 the Miskito Indians and the British were engaged in a military and economic alliance. This thesis follows the development and eventual dissolution of this relationship. The nature of this association is examined largely from the point of view of the Miskito Indians rather than a traditional western or European standpoint. The main theme which occurs throughout the text is the Miskito's struggle to maintain their independence, identity, and autonomy in the face of considerable foreign influence.

Relying on their great courage and strength of character, the Miskito managed to delay their incorporation into Nicaragua and Honduras for over two hundred years. The Indians believed that their close allies, the British, would come to their aid when the need arose. But in the end, it was the British who betrayed the Miskito and delivered them into the greedy hands of the Central American nations.

PREFACE

In the process of preparing this thesis during the summer of 1993, I had the opportunity to visit, interact with, and to learn from the Miskito Indians. It was a journey which afforded me many insights into the character of this vibrant and wonderful people. At times I was accepted into the fold and allowed to experience the pains, pleasures and passions which dominate their present condition. Through this contact I became sympathetic with their causes, especially that of autonomy. Despite my obvious empathy for Miskito endeavors, I made every effort to maintain the historian's objectivity throughout the researching and writing of this thesis. While at times I suppressed certain ideas and feelings, the passion and spirit which the Miskito people displayed inspired me to complete this thesis and to infuse it with the indigenous sense of purpose, meaning and hope.

It is ironic and tragic that the great majority of surviving documents pertaining to the Miskito are kept by their long-time adversaries in Guatemala City. The Archivo General de Centro America contains many important papers, but to examine these and ignore the Miskito's own voice in the telling of their history would constitute a grave error. The past is not history. History is the reconstructed past that is important to a people. There is one past and many

histories.

Unfortunately for the Miskito, many of the documents that could better explain and provide details of their existence were destroyed following Zelaya's invasion of their homeland. In addition, much of their traditional culture and oral history was suppressed by missionaries and converts of the Moravian Church. Despite these limitations, I feel that I learned more about Miskito history during my eight-week journey into their territory, than during the eight-months spent researching relevant sources.

The Miskito's current struggle for autonomy is similar to that of other indigenous nations around the planet. More fortunate than most of these nations, the Miskito have been able to achieve a degree of control and self-government over the territory they describe as their homeland. Nevertheless, the cost of achieving these gains has been high: lives, land, jobs, and perhaps most important to the Miskito - pride.

In order to better understand the Miskito people, it is of paramount importance to understand the historical relationship they maintained with the British during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most works concerning this historical relationship present the Miskito in a most unflattering way - as hopeless and naive natives who were easily duped and controlled by the British. Early works by writers such as the anthropologist Eduard Conzemius,

and the U.S. consul Ephraim Squire, began this misrepresentation. This white, European view of the relationship was willingly adopted by later historians writing on the subject including Troy S. Floyd, and most recently, Robert A. Naylor. As this thesis will illustrate, the Miskito were no mere puppets of the British. Fiercely independent throughout most of this long period, the Miskito directed and controlled their own future. Their relationship with the British was initiated and maintained solely because of the benefits derived from it. Only later, did the Miskito adopt a greater sense of fealty and obligation in their dealings with the British. Even then, the Miskito did not neglect their own interests. Similarly, the British did not seek out and develop an alliance with the Miskito based upon an altruistic need. As might be expected, they had their own economic and military concerns to foster.

Why then the title "The Betrayal of an Alliance"? If this was such an effective and mutually beneficial alliance, why did it eventually disintegrate? The answers lie in the general makeup and character of the two nations. As time passed, the Miskito developed genuine feelings of friendship and comradeship towards the British. When the British needed native help, as they did on many occasions, the Miskito were ready and willing to oblige. Their integrity and loyalty went beyond reproach. The British, however, did not feel the same bonds of empathy and compassion. When

circumstances made the alliance less rewarding, and therefore less appealing to the British, they did not maintain the same sense of fidelity and faithfulness of the Miskito. Two different and often opposing ideas of alliance and friendship were at work: the traditional European method of diplomacy which allowed contracting parties to enter and to leave according to the dictums of 'realpolitik'; and the more humanistic and lasting type of nexus employed by the Miskito.

The present study of the themes of independence, alliance, and betrayal will differ from previous accounts in two important approaches: i) the development of the Miskito/British alliance will be examined from a largely Miskito viewpoint rather than a traditional European view, and ii) this thesis will employ a multi-disciplinary approach drawing upon a wide variety of sources and disciplines, especially of Anthropology and Social Geography. Through the use of this combined approach it is hoped that the reader will gain important insights into the development of a singularly uncommon people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The realization of this study has been possible because of the encouragement, counsel, and support which I can acknowledge here only in a small measure.

Initial thanks go to Dr. Archer and to Dr. Knox for allowing a student in Latin American History to pursue a divergent topic such as the one I have chosen here. Their enthusiasm for the project bolstered my courage to continue in a path where few have dared to tread. Dr. Archer spent innumerable hours patiently reading my thesis and offered many helpful criticisms. In addition to his expert suggestions, he seemed to have a perfect timing for much-needed comic-relief. A special thanks goes out to Ken Thomas from the Department of Geography for his help in the layout and design of the map, and to Lara Shannon for generously advising me on various aspects of the study.

This study was possible because of the extensive research support which I received in the Archivo General de Centro America in Guatemala City. Also, a special mention must be made of the various university libraries which facilitated my research through the inter-library loan program. I owe far more than a note of thanks to all the above and especially to the Miskito people for allowing me to share in their culture and learn from their experiences.

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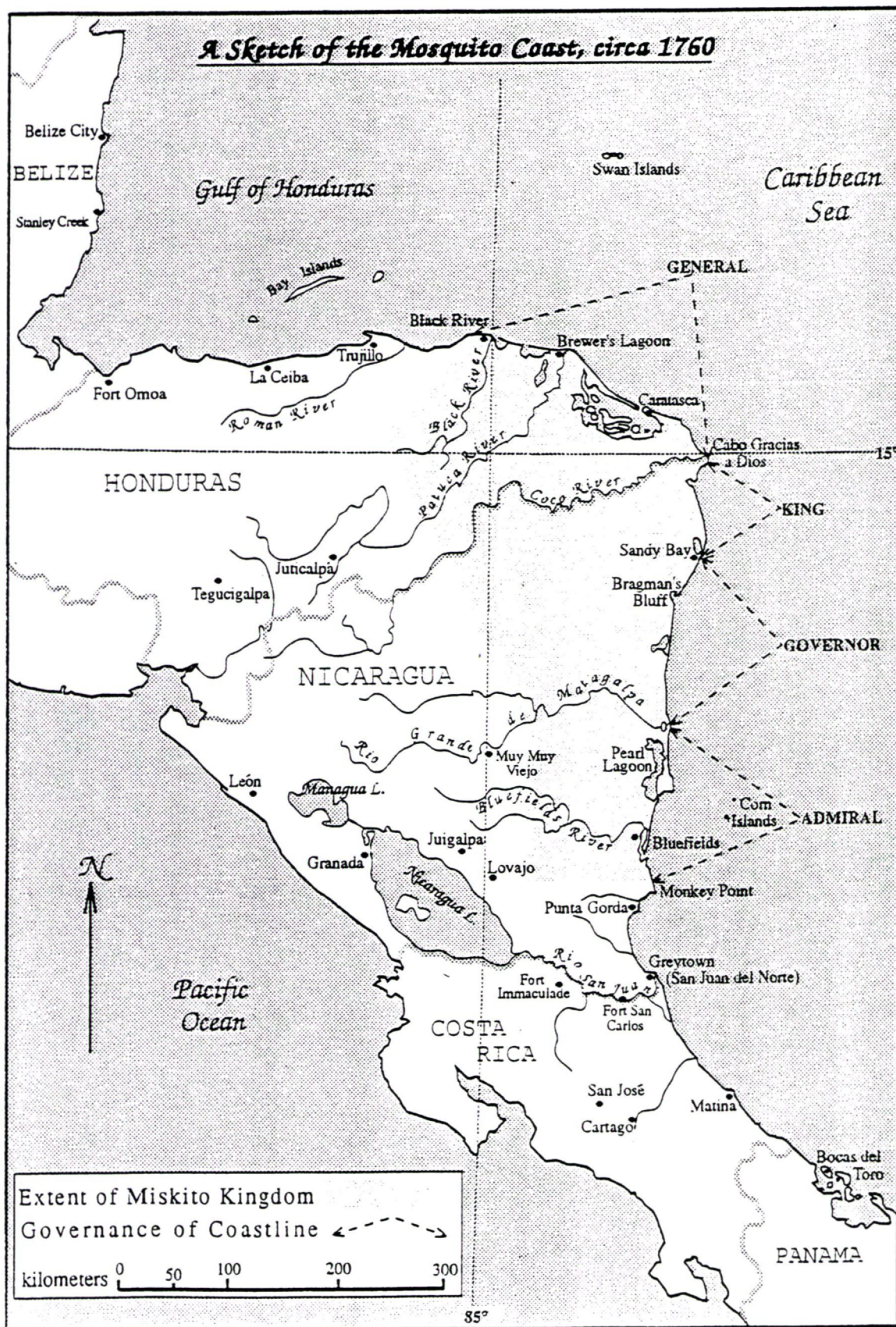
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Chapter 1 - "The Setting"

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.¹

Joseph Conrad, The Heart of Darkness

The Mosquito Coast. The mere mention of the place conjures up images of dense steamy jungles covering viscous swamps. Sunlight, occasionally breaking through the thick canopy of leaves, vines and the ever-present swarm of insects, dimly reveals a momentary glimpse of some strange and exotic animal scurrying beneath the undergrowth. The sweet sticky air is pierced by a howling shriek. A streak of color flashes through the trees overhead as previously unnoticed birds flee the inhuman sound. Danger. It seems to breed in the many dark recesses of this most inhospitable place.

Those who would venture into such a locale must certainly be a breed apart. And what of those who would choose to make this particular region of the world home? Bold? Surely. Resourceful? Without a doubt. Independent? Obviously. Not only to survive, but actually to flourish in such an environment, requires all these characteristics and many more. The people who accepted the challenge to carve

out their livelihood in this exotic world are called the Miskito. Appropriately enough, in their language, Miskito means "those who cannot be displaced."²

The Mosquito Coast is, and was, a demanding place. Equally so for the visitor as it was for the inhabitant. The deluge of rain (up to 715 centimetres per year!), the seasonal monsoons and the unbearable heat combine to make this an extremely daunting habitat. Thick tangles of impenetrable forest reach out to swampy, brackish water. Hull tearing coral reefs and silted-up natural harbours provide the coast with some protection against outside incursions. If that was insufficient deterrent, then sun-eclipsing clouds of mosquitoes, as well as skin burrowing sandflies, ticks, and screwworms usually halted any others who were foolish enough to search out this demi-paradise. It is no wonder that the Spanish ignored this area of Central America for so long.

The forebears of the Miskito were an off-shoot of the Sumu who lived in the interior of present-day Nicaragua. It is probable that population pressures in the interior drove these early ancestors of the Miskito to search for a new home along the Coast.³ By the sixteenth century, the few thousand inhabitants who survived here adapted themselves to a wild but fecund environment. Both the sea and the land teemed with an abundance of wildlife. Fish, shrimp, turtle, manatee and lobster filled the seas and made an easy catch for the highly adaptable and competent Miskito. In the forests, a

cunning hunter could supplement his family's diet with a wide variety of animals including deer, pacas, peccaries, agoutis, tapirs, monkeys and iguanas.

Except for a few places, as along river banks, the practice of agriculture in this region was precarious and discouraging. Heavy rains leached the soil and flooded the rivers, and jungle vegetation choked out the less hardy food crops. Nonetheless, the Miskito planted small patches of tubers and maize. Gathering, accomplished almost solely by the women, became another important activity for these coastal dwellers. They collected a variety of foods including clams, snails, turtle eggs, cacao beans, honey, and insects.⁴ Indeed, in their new habitat, a virtual cornucopia of foods were made available to the Miskito. The Indians took advantage of the manatee and turtles which gathered during mating season at certain localities along the coast. Present-day Bluefields, Pearl Lagoon, and Cape Gracias a Dios became popular hunting grounds. It became necessary for the Miskito to abandon their hamlets for months at a time in order to fish and strike the migrating animals.

Transportation problems associated with a migratory lifestyle were overcome through the use of dugout canoes on the hundreds of miles of navigable rivers, streams, calm lagoons and the open ocean. The Miskito used two types of canoes: the "duerka-taira" and the "kuahi". The "duerka-taira" was a keeled canoe and measured twenty-five to sixty feet in length, had a round bottom and was used primarily on

the open seas where it accomodated as many as fifty individuals. The "kuahi" was a much smaller flat-bottomed canoe designed for hunting in the rivers and shallow lagoons where speed, rather than stability, was the main concern.⁵

Eventually, the Miskito settled along most of the coast. Despite this, Anthropologists have found no evidence of a breakdown of the tribe into clans or exogamous kinship groups. The Indians lived in scattered clusters comprising several families and readily accepted as friends and comrades all those speaking the same language. Those outside the linguistic circle were lumped together as "the enemy" - a quite natural arrangement, considering the dispersed nature of the society.⁶

Within each hamlet, several families resided in simply constructed dwellings that were often nothing more than thatched roofs held up by perpendicular poles. Usually the structures were quite large and contained one room entirely open at the sides, with a central hearth surrounded by a few earthen pots in the middle of a dirt floor. They slept on mats raised a few feet above the ground on frames made with sticks. Each of these simple dwellings appeared to house several families, but in fact this was likely the traditional extended family. Four or five of these domicile structures (more in the few large settlements), generally within call of each other, comprised the settlement.⁷

The Miskito practiced polygamy but this was not always attainable because of the fierce competition for the limited

numbers of women. In households with several wives, the first wife served as mistress of the domicile and received deference from the others. A polygamous husband rarely gave up a wife. Women in a particular household were there either by arranged marriage, often at an early age, or by capture from enemy tribes. Fights over women were a chronic source of friction, especially during feasts. Invariably, the men consumed large quantities of "mishla" (an alcoholic drink made from fermented casaba or corn) during these feasts. The village women often hid all weapons prior to the beginning of the celebrations in order to prevent any harm coming to the participants.⁸

Miskito society was basically egalitarian in structure. The western concept of private property, i.e., proprietary rights to land, was unknown. The Indians respected usufruct rights for the simple dwellings and garden plots. Formal government was not practiced, but the natives did implement a system which satisfied their needs. Each village had a headman selected from among the oldest and most renowned. In times of war and distress the villages selected a chief from the various headmen. Prior to European contact, this position became permanent and hereditary.⁹

There was no priestly class nor were there elaborate religious ceremonies other than those performed by the local shaman or "sukya". Justice was simple. The individual wronged gained redress himself, lest his inaction be interpreted as cowardice. There was no division of labor in

the community. Each family was a self-contained socio-economic unit and either provided for itself or went without. Family production centered on weapons manufactured for the hunt - lances, harpoons, bows and arrows, and canoes. They used twine made from silk grass to make hammocks and fish nets and to make strings for the bows. Some tribes produced a durable cloth made from tree bark and used this to make their clothing. The women performed most of the gathering and domestic work leaving the men to concentrate their efforts on hunting, organizing raiding parties, and leisure activities. William Dampier, an early visitor to the region commented how the Miskito warriors resisted the tedium of manual labor:

... they devote a great part of their days to sleeping in hammocks.... they will pursue the chase through tangled and thorny woods with the most untiring energy but they will scarcely clear the weeds from round their houses.¹⁰

Later, this uncomplicated and leisurely style of living, so unfamiliar to the Europeans who came from relatively advanced agricultural societies, would be characterized as mere laziness and idleness. Catching enough food to last a family for three or four days and then lying about in a hammock for the intervening time was not an approach which the Puritan mind could easily come to grips with. At the same time, the exertions of the Indians on the hunt astonished the Europeans, especially the way they paddled their canoes over incredible distances with no signs of fatigue. In 1672, John Esquemeling, the famous buccaneer-

historian, commented:

Through the frequent converse and familiarity these Indians have with the Pirates, they sometimes used to go to sea with them, and remain among them for whole years, without returning home. Whence it comes that many of them can speak English and French, and some of the Pirates their language. They are very dexterous and daring with the javelin whereby they are very useful to the Pirates towards the victualling of their ships, by the fishing of tortoises, and manatee, a sort of fish so called by the Spaniards. For one of these Indians is alone sufficient to victual a vessel of a hundred persons.¹¹

Reports such as this provide a clear picture concerning the nature of the Miskito. Tough and resilient, they were more than a match for the sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish conquerors who had experienced great difficulties subduing the less fierce tribes of the interior. In Honduras, one such tribe was the Lencas, led by their chief named Lempira. They stubbornly resisted Spanish attempts to dominate them, fighting for years before they surrendered. In Costa Rica, another tribe called the Talamancans evaded Spanish control, especially after the enslavement of some natives provoked a major rebellion. On August 16, 1610, the Talamancans attacked two new Spanish towns of Concepcion and Santiago -leaving both in ruins. The survivors withdrew from the frontier lines to Cartago in the central highlands.¹²

Rumors of Spanish atrocities committed against the Indians of the interior reached the Miskito because of the contacts they had with these tribes. In part, this explains their long standing hatred of the Spaniards. Also, both the Miskito and the Spanish settlers competed for tribute and

slaves from the same tribes. The timing of the arrival of British and other European adventurers to the Coast could not be more fortuitous for the Miskito. In the mid-seventeenth century they acquired weapons in order to confront their Indian and Spanish adversaries in the interior. Participation in raids led to an almost automatic increase in the prestige of the leading warriors of the tribe. Also, the economic benefits were enormous. Better weapons produced more victories and spoils. Greater wealth meant that the Indians could afford to trade for even more weapons. The cycle continued in this manner until the Miskito were masters of the entire Coast. Previously a danger to the Miskito, the Spanish now no longer represented an immediate threat to their existence and independence. They looked forward to many years of unhindered economic and territorial expansion.

In an age of territorial conquests, Britain's involvement on the Coast in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not nearly as rapacious as the actions of the Spanish in other parts of Central America. Indeed, the British simply stumbled upon the Coast and often lacked specific objectives and plans on how to best exploit the region.

Spain and Britain were bitter enemies during the Elizabethan Age and when war erupted again in 1625, it rekindled mutual hatreds. London sponsored any activity that either directly or indirectly weakened Spain. Thus, Captain Sussex Cammock, an officer of the Somers Island

Company which occupied Bermuda, received orders from the governor to attack Spanish shipping or ports anywhere in the Caribbean.¹³ The result of Cammock's voyage into the western Caribbean in 1629 was the discovery (at least for the English) of Providence and Henrietta (San Andres) Islands, lying approximately one hundred and eighty kilometres off the Mosquito Coast. Cammock recognized their value both for agriculture and as strategic bases; he left thirty-one of his men on Henrietta, and returned to Bermuda where he recommended that the islands be occupied permanently. The governor agreed and secured financial support from friends in London who in 1630 formed the Providence Company.¹⁴

By this time, however, not only had peace been restored with Spain, but the chairman and leading figure of the Providence Company, the Earl of Warwick, and the Puritan, John Pym, favored peaceful relations in the New World. Pym believed, naively as it turned out, that peaceful trade could be carried on with Spain. Thus the aggressive character of the venture was altered for a time. Nevertheless, the Company founders undertook to enlarge the scope of the enterprise. The charter issued by James II covered an immense area bounded on the west by the Yucatan peninsula and Providence Island, and on the east by a vague line east of Espanola. Within the grant, the Crown authorized the Company to occupy any land not held by Spain.¹⁵

In 1631, the first contingent of ninety-one colonists reached Providence. Several hundred others arrived in the

next few years, along with at least four hundred African slaves. The colonists abandoned San Andres and concentrated on the development of Providence. Under the leadership of the first governor, Philip Bell, they laid out a town, constructed several forts, and engaged mainly in planting indigo.¹⁶

Within the next five years, the Providence Company occupied other Caribbean islands that fell within the jurisdiction of its charter. These included Tortuga, the later famous lair of the buccaneers, off the northern coast of Espanola, and Roatan, the largest of the Bay islands lying some 85 kilometres off the coast of Honduras. Around the same time (the date generally given is 1638) other English traders apparently unconnected with the Company, settled on the shore of Belize at the mouth of the Belize River.¹⁷ But the most momentous occasion in the history of the area occurred when the British mariners were able to make contact with the Miskito people who lived along the shore. This contact was to have a great influence on British designs in the area, and an even more profound affect on the day to day life of the Miskito Indians.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ Joseph Conrad, The Heart of Darkness (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1902), p. 4.

² George R. Heath, "Notes on Miskuto [sic] grammar and on other Indian Languages of Eastern Nicaragua," American Anthropologist, 15, (1913), p. 49. Less reliable reports on how the Miskito came to be named as such include ideas that they were named after the swarms of mosquitoes on the Coast; that they were named after the many small keys and islands off the Coast "which lie as thick as mosquitoes"; or that their acquisition of firearms prompted other tribes to start calling them "the muskets", and this eventually became corrupted to "the Miskito". See Anne M. Chapman, An Historical Analysis of the Tropical Forest Tribes on the Southern Border of Mesoamerica (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York: Columbia University, 1958), p. 55.

³ Strong linguistic as well as biological links connecting the Sumu and the Miskito supports the hypothesis that they are related. See Linda Newson, The Cost of Conquest: Indian Decline in Honduras Under Spanish Rule (London: Westview Press, 1986), p. 43.

⁴ There is some debate as to whether cacao beans were actually harvested by the Miskito prior to contact. Chapman, p. 96.

⁵ The evidence for this comes from an English buccaneer who spent much time on the Coast and who is identified solely

by the mysterious initials of M. W. The autobiographical account of his adventures can be found in M. W. "The Mosquito [sic] Indian and His Golden River..." A Collection of Voyages and Travels (London: Lintot and Osborn, 1752), pp. 297-312.

⁶ Eduard Conzemius, Ethnographical Survey of the Miskito and Sumu Indians of Honduras and Nicaragua (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 106, 1932), vol. 6, p. 12-17.

⁷ M. W., p. 324.

⁸ "Mishla feasts" accompanied marriages and funerals and they were also held at harvest time, prior to expeditions or raids, or in order to settle disputes with neighbours. Mishla itself was prepared by the women of the village who chewed on the casaba or corn before adding it to the preparation. It was believed that younger women produced a more potent drink. See Newson, p. 82.

⁹ Conzemius, p. 19.

¹⁰ William Dampier, A New Voyage Around the World; 3 vols. (3d ed. London, 1698), vol. 1, p. 11. Dampier was on the coast in 1681. For other descriptions of Miskito culture prior to 1672, see John Esquemeling, The Buccaneers of America ... Written Originally in Dutch by John Esquemeling, revised and edited by William Swanstallybrass, (London, 1764), pp. 172-181.

¹¹ Esquemeling, pp. 233-234.

¹² "Testimonio ... indios de las nacion Talamancan, August 20, 1615," Archivo General de Centro America,

(Guatemala City: Section A3.16, leg. 146, exp. 988.
Hereafter cited as AGCA.

¹³ Jose Dolores Gamez, Historia de la Costa de Mosquitos
(Managua: Talleres Nacionales, 1939), p. 37.

¹⁴ Gamez, p. 39.

¹⁵ Arthur Percival Newton, The Colonising Activities of
the English Puritans, (London: Brayman and Sons, 1914), p.
54.

¹⁶ Newton, p. 55.

¹⁷ Archives of British Honduras, ed. John Burdon, 3
Vols. (London: Sifton Praed and Company, 1931-1935), Vol. I,
p. 4.

Chapter 2 - "The Courtship"

What have I done for you,
England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
England, my own?¹

W. E. Henly, For England's Sake

The English had the most permanent and lasting impact of the various Europeans who ultimately visited the Coast, but they were by no means the first. Initial European contact with the Miskito may have been as early as 1502 when Christopher Columbus arrived in the area on his fourth and last voyage. In August of that year Columbus' Spanish caravels anchored off the mouth of the Black River in north-eastern Honduras. Columbus's brother, Ferdinand, recorded his impressions of the Indians whom they encountered along the Coast:

The people of this country are much like those of the islands but that their foreheads are not so high, nor do they seem to have any religion. For the most part they go naked, but cover their privities, some wear short jumps down to their navel without sleeves; their arms and bodies have figures wrought on them with fire, which make them look oddly. On a festival day they colour their faces, some black, and some red; others draw streaks of several colours; others paint their nose, and others black their eyes; and thus they adorn themselves to appear beautiful, whereas in truth they look like devils.²

And from the same account Ferdinand writes:

The Indians possess ... long wooden swords with a channel on each side where the edge should be, in which there were sharp edges of flint fixed with thread, and a bituminous sort of matter which cut naked men as if they were of steel.³

Unfortunately, Ferdinand did not provide the name of the Indians he described, but given the location and the general characteristics noted, it is quite possible that this was the first written account of the Miskito, or perhaps their close relatives, the Poya. Although Ferdinand Columbus wrote this almost thirty years after his voyage, his report is valuable because it provides a glimpse, however subjective it may be, of aboriginal culture prior to acculturation.

Columbus sailed along the entire Mosquito Coast and managed to reach the San Juan River but he failed to note its importance - the river was the long-sought after strait, the source of which lay tantalizingly close to the Pacific Ocean. Apparently the natives of the area provided no information as to the uniqueness of the river.⁴ Thus, limited contacts spared the Miskito from an early gold-induced invasion of their territory.

The next Europeans to make contact with the Miskito were French buccaneers who found the Coast to be a safe haven when not raiding Spanish treasure ships and coastal shipping. As early as 1612 these rogues of the sea utilized Miskito know-how to supplement their meagre food supplies and to help them navigate the treacherous reef infested waters.⁵ Some sort of trade undoubtedly took place between the French and the Miskito, but unfortunately their relationships were not documented at this time.

The earliest evidence of commerce taking place between the Miskito and Europeans is provided by the records of the

Providence Island Company. Attempts by the company to establish a trade to the south with the Indians of the Isthmus of Panama encountered anti-white hostility and prompted the English to shift their attention to the nearby Mosquito Coast. In 1633, Captain Sussex Cammock established a trading site on the Mosquito Coast.⁶ Instructions from John Pym reiterated the importance of cementing amicable and just relations with the Indian inhabitants who had been accustomed to fishing off the island of Providence. He ordered Captain Cammock to "... endear yourselves with the Indians and their commanders and we conjure you to be friendly and cause no jealousy."⁷ The Miskito were known to harbor strong negative feelings about the Spanish and it was hoped that this did not apply to all Europeans.

Approaching the hump of the Central American Isthmus slightly south of where the Wanks River empties into the Caribbean at Cape Gracias a Dios, Captain Cammock landed on the offshore Mosquito Keys, directly opposite the stretch of coast inhabited by the Miskito. He experienced no difficulties in establishing friendly relations. The Miskito men had previous experiences with other European visitors to the Coast and with the buccaneers. Also, the small number of Englishmen on Cammock's ship probably were not perceived as a threat. The Indians approached these strange newcomers, whom they dubbed "the grey-eyed people."⁸

Prompted by a blend of fearlessness, curiosity and want, the Miskito responded to the friendly overtures, and

supported a reciprocal relationship that led to exchanges of trade items. The English registered incoming merchandise in an orderly fashion and carefully distributed territorial districts for trading purposes to agents, who proceeded to call on the villages. The British received richly colored tortoise shells, tortoise meat to provide protein for the ship's crew, fish, crustaceans and animal skins. In exchange they gave the Indians trinkets, cloth, swords and on some occasions firearms.⁹ Cammock's voyage initiated a pattern of trade on the Coast which lasted for over two hundred years. It remained a region whose absence of good deep harbors forced potential traders to use schooners, sloops and dugouts. Although the natural geography of the area hindered large-scale mercantile development, it also denied the use of large brigantines and frigates that could have been employed by the Spanish to dislodge early entrepreneurs.

During the remaining years of the reign of Charles I of England, the son of a great Miskito chief was taken to England and reportedly spent two or three years as the ward of the earl of Warwick. The young Miskito warrior learned the English language, acquired a taste for the accoutrements of European life, and probably developed a desire to please his new friends.¹⁰ He returned to the Coast in the 1640's and gained a heightened sense of importance because his new contacts, training, and education gave him advantages beyond his birthright over other claimants to the office of head chief. Indeed, upon his return he became the dominant chief

among the Miskito and earned the name "Oldman" by living to a ripe old age. He possessed a document given to him while in England that requested him to lend any assistance he could to Englishmen who visited that part of the Coast.¹¹ Although many modern historians, anthropologists and geographers have written about Oldman as if he were a mere puppet of the English, this image is distorted. In electing Oldman as chief, the Miskito simply followed their own age-old tradition of primogeniture. Oldman happened to have better training and better contacts than most, and these advantages were beneficial for the Miskito. Oldman's subsequent actions over the following years were not those of a sycophant, but rather the policies of a willing partner in trade and privateering.¹²

Through their close contacts with English and French buccaneers, and English traders, the Miskito soon learned how to use firearms and became known as very brave fighters. Dampier noted:

When they come among Privateers, they get the use of Guns, and prove very good Marks-Men: they behave themselves very bold in fight, and never seem to flinch nor hang back; for they think that the white Men with whom they are, know better than they do when it is best to fight, and let the disadvantage of their Party be never so great, they will never yield nor give back while any of their Party stand.¹³

As soon as they obtained firearms the Miskito commenced raids against Spanish settlements and neighboring Indians. Warfare was endemic between the Miskito and different Sumu subtribes, but the similarity of traditional weapons and size

of fighting parties had kept the situation fairly even. Whereas the Miskito warriors had not been a danger to potential enemies because of their small numbers and scattered distribution, once armed with guns they extended their territory and influence. The Sumu Indians had little direct contact with the buccaneers and traders and consequently they did not obtain guns. The anonymous observer, M. W. noted that the Sumu were "extremely terrified at the firing of a gun, out of which, they say, an evil spirit issues."¹⁴

M. W.'s account of Miskito raiding practises describes how they preferred to attack the Sumu at night and rarely in the open. The Miskito warriors captured young wives, women, and children for use as slaves or concubines, and either killed or put to flight the men and old women of enemy villages. These practices were not without risk for the Miskito fighters because if a member of a raiding party was caught, he could expect no quarter from the Sumu. M. W. observed "... while the prisoner lives, they draw out his finger and toe nails, and knock out his teeth with stones; which teeth and nails they wear about their necks on a string like a necklace."¹⁵

As well as dominating the surrounding Indian tribes, the Miskito allied with British buccaneers in frequent raids against Spanish settlements in the interior of Nicaragua and on the northern coast of Honduras. In 1640, with the blessings of the Providence authorities, Captain William

Jackson and his Miskito guides conducted a profitable raid up the San Juan River. At about the same time, Captain Nathaniel Butler, the new governor of Providence, attacked Trujillo and forced the Spanish to abandon this important outpost.¹⁶ This fort had previously put a damper on any buccaneering designs in the area. With its defeat came a subsequent rise in attacks and raids by the Miskito and English. In 1654, 1704, 1709, 1711, and 1743 the English and Miskito attacked the town of Nueva Segovia, then located at the site of what is now Ciudad Antigua. Exasperated by raids, in 1789 the Spanish finally moved Nueva Segovia to a new site further away from the frontier (to Ocotal).¹⁷ The Miskito experienced the rewards and excitement of raiding and pillaging well before any European set foot on their territory, but the buccaneers expanded this form of economic activity and greatly impressed the Indians.

In 1665, Captain John Morris stopped at Cape Gracias a Dios, picked up twenty Miskito Indians, and with their help ascended the San Juan River and crossed Lake Nicaragua to attack the town of Granada. The combined force of Miskito and English assaulted the city in broad daylight, overturned eighteen artillery pieces and herded the surprised city militia into the main church. They proceeded to plunder the city for sixteen hours assisted by approximately one-thousand Indian residents of the city. After sinking Spanish vessels at Granada in order to make pursuit impossible, they sailed away with a number of black slaves and 6,000 pesos in coin

and bullion.¹⁸

Despite various attempts by the Spanish to fortify their positions, they remained a favorite target of the Miskito and English for many years. In 1679 and 1684, the Miskito and English assaulted Fort San Felipe, built on the shore of the Golfo Dulce in 1655. The first attack, an easy victory, resulted in the capture of a thousand bottles of wine and eight hundred chests of indigo. The success of this assault discouraged the Spanish captain general, Dr. Lope de Sierra Osorio, who remained in command of the fort. Sierra Osorio recommended abandoning the fort, which he described as a "useless, miserable hut."¹⁹

Despite Spanish measures to bolster the fort with additional artillery and pedreros (stone throwers), the Miskito and buccaneers returned in 1684 with a combined force of more than 400 men and overwhelmed the defenders. They destroyed nine cannons and the stonethrowers and carried off the small arms. This time the attackers found very little booty and in a rash act of disappointment and rage, they burned the fort.²⁰

Through their contacts with the buccaneers, the Miskito learned to use firearms, short swords, and iron knives, and also obtained metal points for their own weapons. In addition they began to use iron pots, utensils, and other European goods. While visiting Kingston, Jamaica, the Miskito, who knew English based on their friendship with the buccaneers, accustomed themselves with British life in the

islands. While residing among the English, they wore European clothes which they discarded as soon as they returned home. Only very important Miskito leaders wore British uniforms on the Coast, the great majority of Indians preferred their simple and comfortable loincloths. Jamaican authorities treated the Miskito natives well, allowing them to come and go as they pleased on any ship going to the Central American Coast.²¹

The close contacts established between the two peoples increased their interdependence. The English used their favored relationships to make use of Miskito knowledge of the coastal region by employing them as guides. Miskito dugouts and canoes became the vessels of choice for navigating the dangerous shoal waters. Also, in the English raids on the Spanish, the Miskito warriors often tipped the scale of balance in favor of their allies. In an area of the world where European manpower was in very short supply their ferocity and warlike skills were used to great advantage.

In return, the Miskito Indians increased both the size of their territorial domain and the prestige and tribute that they collected from surrounding tribes. Always an aggressive tribe, the Miskito found a great advantage in their alliances with the English. By the end of the seventeenth century this led to an imitation of some English practices. The Indians adopted a more fully developed and formal sense of hierarchy. In addition, they expressed a growing fondness for cast-off British uniform parts which

they used to designate ranks within their kingdom. The more prominent Miskito chiefs at Cape Gracias a Dios and Sandy Bay described themselves as "captain" and many of the leading males adopted names such as Kitt, Morgan, Labrin, Patrick and Frank.²² Local chiefs grew in stature as intermediaries for the buccaneers and as the beneficiaries of English favors and attention. The process was gradual, but even before the seventeenth century was out, life on the Mosquito Coast had changed as a direct response to the interactions between the buccaneers and the Indians.

Although the Miskito people experienced remarkable cultural adaptations as a result of their contacts with the English, many historians, anthropologists and social geographers have argued that the Indians underwent an even more profound alteration of their culture and general character as a consequence of a purely chance occurrence. This random incident, in 1641, was the grounding of a wayward slave ship northwest of Cape Gracias a Dios. According to the Bishop of Nicaragua, the slaves took control of the ship and killed their white captors. Having little knowledge of navigation, the stray ship, and its unfortunate passengers drifted about until smashing onto the reefs on the north coast of Honduras. There is some debate as to whether the Indians of the area killed the male occupants of the slave ship and took only the women as servants and wives, or, if all the survivors somehow became integrated into the Indian culture. Nevertheless, the evidence shows clearly that

miscegenation of Indians and African slaves commenced sometime during this period.²³

A number of historians and anthropologists have concluded that the Miskito Indians did not exist as a distinct people prior to the 1641 miscegenation. They argue, that given the close linguistic and cultural links of the Miskito to the Sumu, the Miskito were merely a sub-group of the Sumu and not a distinct people. Arguments to this effect originate in the otherwise satisfactory 1932 study of the Miskito by the ethnographer Edward Conzemius. Historians such as Troy S. Floyd and Robert A. Naylor, the anthropologist Mary W. Helms, and the social geographer Linda Newson, have repeated his error. The works of these authors and others confuse this particular aspect of Miskito history.²⁴

As early as 1672 Esquemeling observed that the Miskito could not communicate with the Sumu tribes of the interior while other Sumu tribes conversed freely with each other.²⁵ If the Miskito had been a Sumu tribe only thirty-one years before Esquemelin's observation, they should have possessed a sufficiently similar language to facilitate communications. The fact that this was not the case indicates that the Miskito diverged from the Sumu much earlier and prior to Esquemeling's visit.

Another piece of evidence that demonstrates the unique status of the Miskito was their willingness, prior to 1641, to intermarry with non-Indians. No Sumu tribe

exhibited a similar openness to outside blood lines. Dampier noted that many buccaneers established relations with Miskito women while they were stationed on the Coast.²⁶ One further historical indication that the Miskito existed as a culturally distinct tribe prior to 1641, was the previously mentioned visit of the son of a great Miskito chief to England during the reign of Charles I. Since this visit occurred before 1649, the date of Charles' death, it is highly unlikely that a distinct culture such as that described by the Miskito visitor to England could have flourished and developed in the mere eight years after the shipwreck. Instead, the evidence demonstrates the ability of a strong and distinct Miskito culture to adapt to changing circumstances, not that "... the tribe of the Miskito owes its origin to the intermarriage of the Sumu with the Negroes escaped from the slave ship."²⁷

A different, but equally incorrect twist on the above argument was made by the anthropologist Mary Helms. In a 1971 work on the Miskito she claimed that the "... existence of the Miskito as an identifiable ethnic group with a distinctive way of life is a direct result of trade with the West."²⁸ While Helms was correct in her documentation of social and economic changes in the Miskito culture that came as a result of contact, it is clear that these changes were adaptations and not spontaneous creations. The Miskito's distinctive culture as a group with a well-defined adaptation to a littoral environment was evident at the time of first

contact with Europeans. The Miskito did not "originate" a new culture or go through a cultural metamorphosis as a result of trade with the West. They did, however, make extensive cultural adaptations to new economic systems and helped to transform and transfer energy and materials from their ecosystem to overseas systems. Their capacity to regulate internal changes was reduced, and new cultural patterns became evident. The most obvious was the use of the English language by the leading male members of Miskito society.²⁹

Although an early fusion of Miskito and British aims was apparent by the mid-seventeenth century, an even more profound blending occurred later. By 1685, buccaneering had been effectively outlawed. In 1683, Sir Thomas Lynch, governor of Jamaica, suspended Henry Morgan from all his duties, and not long afterward the London government was able to furnish Lynch with military support in order to enforce laws against piracy.³⁰ Obviously Spain was willing to cooperate: the Madrid government issued a cedula on February 21, 1685, ordering the captain general either to execute pirates falling into his hands or to send them to the galleys in Spain.³¹

Given these pressures, many buccaneers were forced to resort to a different means of earning a living. Many settled in the area of the Mosquito Coast and Belize in regions where they could harvest the plentiful supplies of mahogany and logwood. The buccaneers and the English traders

who followed them to the Coast now presented Spain with a new security problem. The English realized the precariousness of their own situation and this became the *raison d'être* for their acceptance of the Miskito offer of alliance.

The period of courtship between the Miskito and English was over, a more serious commitment was soon to come into effect.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ W. E. Henly, "For England's Sake," in Pro Rege Nostro, (London: Worthington, 1900), p. 17.

² Ferdinand Columbus, "The History of the Life and Actions of Admiral Christopher Colon, and of his Discovery of the West Indies, called the New World," in A General Collection of Voyages and Travels, ed. John Pinkerton, Vol. XII, (London: Westgate House, 1812), p. 127-128.

³ Ferdinand Columbus, p. 126.

⁴ Christopher Columbus, "A letter written by don Christopher Columbus, Viceroy and Admiral of the Indies, to the most Christian and mighty Sovereigns ..." (1503), in Select Letters of Christopher Columbus ..., ed. R. H. Major, (London: Brayman and Sons, 1847), p. 173.

⁵ Dampier, vol. II, pp. 212-215. Dampier was a well known English navigator who visited the Corn Islands, Bluefields Lagoon, and Cape Gracias a Dios in 1681. Additional information is provided by the French buccaneer, Raveneau de Lussan, who, along with his crew, crossed Nicaragua in 1688 from the West coast to the East by descending the Rio Coco on rafts. See Raveneau de Lussan, Buccaneer of the Spanish Main and Early French Filibuster of the Pacific, ed. M. E. Wilbur, (Cleveland: Clark, 1930), pp. 148-163.

⁶ Robert A. Naylor, Penny Ante Imperialism, (London: Associated University Press, 1989), p. 30. Naylor's work is

well documented in respect to British activities on the Mosquito Coast but he fails to provide sufficient information regarding the importance of the Miskito in British affairs.

⁷ Cited in Troy S. Floyd, The Anglo-Spanish Struggle For Mosquitia, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), p. 19.

⁸ Newton, p. 62.

⁹ Dampier, vol. II, p. 16. Tortoise shell soon became a very popular item in Europe. It was used in clocks, picture frames and furniture. The animal skins provided included deer, jaguar and manatee hides.

¹⁰ The exact date of the young warrior's visit to England is difficult to ascertain. M. W. said that the trip was made during the reign of Charles I and soon after the British captured Jamaica. Since Charles I died in 1649 he must have meant the temporary seizure in 1643 and not the more permanent occupation in 1655. See M. W., p. 302.

¹¹ This information comes from Sir Hans Sloane, the personal physician to the Governor of Jamaica. A later Miskito King visited the island and gave an account of "Oldman" to Sloane. See Sir Hans Sloane, A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica, (London: Printed by M. B. for the Author, 1707), p. 26.

¹² For an interesting discussion on the unbroken Miskito line of succession, see Michael D. Olien, "The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession," Journal of Anthropological

Research, 39 (1983), pp. 179-197.

¹³ Dampier, vol. 1, p. 14.

¹⁴ M. W., p. 290.

¹⁵ M. W., p. 291.

¹⁶ Newton, p. 58.

¹⁷ "Casasola to Fernandez, June 27, 1790," AGCA, A1.1, leg. 118, exp. 2484.

¹⁸ This expedition is described more fully in Floyd, pp. 29-31.

¹⁹ "Sierra Osorio to Crown, May 15, 1679," AGCA, A1.1, leg. 42, exp. 517.

²⁰ M. Rodriguez del Valle, El Castillo de San Felipe del Golfo Dulce, (Sevilla: Tipografia Progresso, 1960), p. 35.

²¹ Esquemeling, p. 238.

²² M. W., p. 302. The prevalence of English names among the Miskito exists even to this day. Even in the most remote of villages one is certain to find someone called Smith or Jones.

²³ "Bishop of Nicaragua," AGCA, A1.12, leg. 139, exp. 104, (30.11.1711). Many different versions of the shipwreck abound in the literature of the eighteenth century including a variation that the slaves captured and killed the Indians. This is highly unlikely since the escaped slaves would have lacked sufficient weapons, were outnumbered, and were not familiar with the terrain.

²⁴ See Floyd p. 22, Naylor p. 32, Chapman p. 55, and Newson p. 43.

25 Esquemeling, p. 224.

26 Dampier, vol. 1, p. 16.

27 Conzemius, p. 17.

28 Mary Helms, Asang: Adaptations to Culture Contact in a Miskito Community, (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1971), p. 228.

29 The main theme of this later position against the "metamorphosis" of the Miskito was first brought to my attention by Bernard Nietschmann's book, The Unknown War: The Miskito Nation, Nicaragua, and the United States, (New York: Freedom House, 1989). In particular, see p. 17.

30 Floyd, p. 37.

31 "Cedula, August 25, 1685," AGCA, A1.23, leg. 1513, exp. 561.

Chapter 3 - "Union and the First Betrayal"

And in these degrees they have made a pair of stairs to marriage which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage.¹

William Shakespeare,
As You Like It

In 1687 the Miskito Kingdom was in disarray. Oldman, the Miskito leader, died the year before and a struggle for control of the kingship ensued. The eventual victor was Oldman's son Jeremy I. Jeremy possessed a keen political acumen, and in 1687, he visited the Jamaican governor, the duke of Albermale, in order to secure his position and consolidate his power on the Coast. The acknowledgment of his position by the duke helped to legitimize Jeremy's succession because of the status this act conveyed to the important Miskito leaders. The governor of Jamaica, in a letter to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, wrote:

Some Indians known by the name of "Musketa" Indians have been here with me and have told me that they became subjects of King Charles I and that they earnestly desired the King's protection or they must fall under [the protection of] the French or Dutch.²

This statement reflects well on Jeremy's understanding of alliances and power politics. In one deft move Jeremy was able to secure an alliance with the British (under the threat of making a similar alliance with the French or Dutch) and he was also able to strengthen his status as king. The Jamaican

governor recognized the importance of maintaining friendly relations with the Miskito because Spain's claim to sovereignty over Belize and the Mosquito Coast threatened potential British advances in those areas. Through this visit, Governor Albermarle recognized the leader of a sovereign and independent people. He reaffirmed Jeremy's status as king and recognized the validity of the British document handed down from Oldman to Jeremy which obliged the Miskito to "kindly relieve such straggling Englishmen as should chance to come that way, with plantains, fish, and turtle."³

Sir Hans Sloane related some of the incidents which occurred during this visit. Apparently Jeremy's "colorful" language (remember, his tutors were largely English buccaneers) so upset the governor's wife during a formal dinner that she fled from the table. On another occasion, Jeremy, not satisfied with answers to his questions regarding the geography of the island, promptly removed his European clothes and climbed up the tallest tree in sight to obtain an unimpaired view. Albermarle found the Miskito visitors to be very affable and as a gesture of friendship gave them some gifts. Despite the governor's acceptance of the new Miskito king, he refused Jeremy's request to place a British governor or superintendent on the Coast. Earlier that year the remnants of an infamous pirate band had escaped to the Mosquito Coast and Albermarle incorrectly feared that Jeremy may have been influenced by them.⁴

Modern historians such as Edwin Morrisby and Robert A. Naylor downplay the significance of Jeremy's visit. They argue that the British exploited the natives simply to advance their own interests and that they did not truly recognize Miskito independence. Both historians disregard the fact that Jeremy initiated the visit and made the most of the diplomatic negotiations. Morrisby poked "gentle fun" at the encounter and noted that the first kings were crowned "with an old hat" which was later replaced by a "gilt crown."⁵ To dismiss the visit as a British ploy denegrates the Miskito's understanding of alliances, as well as their initiative, independence, and pride.

The death of Jeremy I in 1720 produced a short period of instability in the Mosquito Kingdom. During Jeremy's reign additional positions of authority had been created to formalize Miskito government and to expand their control over further reaches of the Coast. Jeremy named a general to control the area from Black River to Cape Gracias a Dios, and a governor to take charge of the territory south of Sandy Bay to Pearl Lagoon. These two Indian offices granted the holders considerable local autonomy yet they were still under the domain and influence of the king. Jeremy's son succeeded to the throne as Jeremy II. His father had appointed his brother Peter as general of the northern Miskito territory and Peter continued to rule this region during Jeremy II's reign. However, the southern leader, Governor Annibel, was not so anxious to lend his support to Jeremy II and so

requested Spanish assistance to enhance his own position. On November 12, 1721, Governor Annibel, with 507 of his followers, swore an oath of obedience to the Spanish king. Moreover, he promised to deliver "Bernabe", and General "Pitar" by March 5, 1722, and to have them submit to the Spanish as well.⁶ "Bernabe" referred to Jeremy II, given the inconsistent spelling of the time. Similarly, "Pitar" was General Peter, who became king following Jeremy II's death in 1729. The potential rebellion was defused by the Miskito king by enforcing a blockade on all Spanish ships attempting to visit the southern reaches of the Coast.

Peter's ascension to the throne was also marred by some dissension among the Miskito. On October 3, 1729, Peter wrote to Governor Hunter of Jamaica:

The King my Royal Brother lately dying, myself hardly settled on the throne of my ancestors, the Governor also suddenly dying, left the Kingdom in such an unsettled condition as has given some of my people an opportunity to rise in rebellion and commit such outrages as I am shamed to think of, having robbed the white people living near them of all they had in the world, nay even of their children...⁷

After describing an uneasy situation on the Coast, Peter asked the governor for a signed commission legitimizing his rule and the posts of his newly appointed governor and general. Peter's bargaining position with the British was not nearly as strong as that enjoyed earlier by Jeremy I. Although he was forced by political expediency to submit to English rule, Peter refused to subordinate himself or to lessen his status as king over a separate and sovereign

people. In the same letter he noted that there always had been a "good understanding between the subjects of His Majesty of Great Britain and the inhabitants of my Kingdom."⁸ King Peter ruled until his death in 1739. During his ten year reign circumstances evolved that forced the British to increase their reliance on the Miskito. In 1737 the Maroon rebellion in the interior of Jamaica plagued the Jamaican governor. In 1720 an agreement with King Jeremy II provided fifty Miskito warriors to track down the rebellious Maroons. The plan was aborted, however, because of a lack of funds. By 1737 it was necessary to revive the plan as the situation with the Maroons became intolerable. The Jamaican assembly resolved to hire two hundred Miskito mercenaries to assist in crushing the rebellion. The governor dispatched several ships to convey the Indians to Jamaica. They formed their own companies under Miskito leaders and were paid forty shillings a month. In an ironic reversal of roles, white guides led them to the trouble spots. The Miskito warriors excelled in this kind of woodland fighting and the beleaguered Maroons eventually came to terms with the British authorities.⁹ The Miskitos clearly demonstrated their effectiveness as a reliable combat force. With the prospect of a renewed conflict against the Spanish, the British recognized the advantages of a closer alliance.

Hostilities against Spain broke out in 1739. The War of Jenkins' Ear presented the aggressive governor of Jamaica, Edward Trelawny, a good reason to strengthen British

relations with the Miskito Indians. He sent Captain Robert Hodgson to the Mosquito Coast in order to determine the nature of the British position in the Bay of Honduras and to ascertain what assistance the Indians could render in a projected attack against the kingdom of Guatemala. Hodgson reached the small northern community of Black River in 1740 and began to reinforce British-Miskito ties.

King Peter died in 1739 leaving the throne to his nephew, Jermei II's oldest son, Edward. Edward was not quite twenty at the time of Hodgson's arrival and he had to struggle for respect among his own people. He was open to Hodgson's influence and promised to provide warriors to assist Governor Trelawny's invasion plan. Although the groundwork for a closer alliance had been laid, the British expedition against the kingdom of Guatemala was ill-conceived and did not materialize. In 1749, Hodgson returned to the Coast as its first superintendent. Appointed by the secretary of state, the Duke of Bedford, he was to cultivate friendship and union with the Indians "as may induce them to prefer his Majesty's alliance and protection to that of any other power whatsoever."¹⁰ Hodgson was to be paid an annual salary of 1,330 British pounds of which 300 were to be used to purchase gifts for the Miskito leaders. Hodgson told the Miskito that "as they had long acknowledged themselves subjects of Great Britain, the governor of Jamaica had sent me to take possession of their country in his Majesty's name."¹¹ He then planted a standard, read the articles of

possession, and fired a gun. The inexperienced Edward may have welcomed Hodgson because he reaffirmed the Miskito leader's position as king. In any case, Edward was in no position to resist the new superintendent's influence in his domain.

The appointment of an English superintendent for the Coast was an important step in the evolution of a protectorate system - a device used to oversee a region without claiming outright sovereignty. Under this arrangement, power was exercised with the consent of both parties. The protectorate was a form of guardianship over the native people and did not entail any transfer of territorial sovereignty. The only limit to the control exercised under a protectorate was that territorial sovereignty must not be extinguished; otherwise annexation would have occurred.¹²

Superintendent Hodgson did not attempt to cross the precarious line of outright annexation. He respected the traditional Miskito forms of government and was careful not to alienate the King nor his subordinates. As the Miskito increased the territory under their control, south of Pearl Lagoon to Bluefields and Monkey Point, Edward needed to create a new position of admiral. This district was important because it served as a jumping off point for raids up the Bluefields River.¹³ Despite this, there is no evidence, as has been suggested by Naylor, Morrisby, and others, that Hodgson actively interfered in this appointment,

or any other in the region. This was not to say that he lacked a significant influence on the Coast. His preoccupation was with increasing trade and cementing alliances - to the degree that his opponents criticized him for meddling in internal Miskito affairs.¹⁴

Because the British economic stake in the region rose sharply during the early part of the eighteenth century, Hodgson received the post as superintendent of the Coast. The Treaty of Madrid and the American Treaty determined England's diplomatic position in the Caribbean. Signed by Spain and England in 1667 and 1670, these treaties granted the King of England "all lands in the West Indies of America he then occupied."¹⁵ The two powers understood this to include both the earlier occupied islands and the North American mainland, as well as recently conquered Jamaica. But at the time neither side considered that the treaty included the tiny, informal settlements on Belize and the Mosquito Coast, and it is doubtful whether any individuals involved in the signing were even aware of them. Later, England claimed that the general wording of the treaty included these coastal settlements. Spain denied this claim consistently, and refused to relinquish its title to the Coast during the entire colonial era.¹⁶

After the War of the Spanish Succession, the British pursued the logwood trade more aggressively. Rightly or wrongly, the British government concluded that under the terms of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, they had the right to

cut logwood in areas they occupied prior to the 1670 Treaty of Madrid. The Spanish resisted British incursions into areas which they believed belonged to them. By the early 1720's they forcibly evicted British woodcutters from the Bay of Campeche. Throughout the next three decades Spanish coast guard vessels continued to seize British logwood ships. When the Spanish attacked Belize in 1730, capturing seven vessels and taking fifty prisoners, the fugitives took refuge in the Black River settlement.¹⁷ The presence of the Miskito Indians, and treacherous waters at the river's mouth made surprise attacks by the Spanish unlikely. The Spanish made no attempt to occupy Belize; they just wanted to cut off rival supplies of logwood. But, as soon as Spanish forces left Belize, the woodcutters returned to resume their former activities. Thus, Black River became an important outpost for the one remaining source of British logwood.

Some of the Jamaican ships bound for Belize with cargos of merchandise, rum, and provisions to exchange for logwood stopped at Black River to ensure that the Spanish would not be waiting for them on the other side of the Bay of Honduras. A few ship's captains began to use Black River as a base with which to engage in clandestine trade with Spanish settlements of the interior. Often the Miskito acted as intermediaries, travelling up the Black River in their shallow draft canoes. The Miskito then used their subordinates, the Poya Indians, to merchandise the goods directly to the criollo and mestizo settlers. By the mid-eighteenth century the English exported

annually over 25,000 British pounds of logwood, mahogany, tortoise shell, silver, indigo and sarsaparilla from the Black River settlement alone.¹⁸

The Miskito benefited from their position as middlemen. They extended their dominance over other Indian tribes along the coast and into the interior. As early as 1737, virtually all of the 400,000 pounds of cacao beans produced by mestizo and criollo settlers in the Matina district (the eastern coast of Costa Rica) were traded to the Miskito or to Englishmen who used the Miskito's water transport to evade Spanish customs collectors. The Central Americans obviously enjoyed having an alternative outlet for their wares. In 1759, the people of Cartago rebelled and ran their new governor out of the province after he and his men slaughtered a trading party of seventy-two Miskito Indians and Englishmen as they slept on the Matina Coast.¹⁹

By this time, the settlement at Black River had grown to 3,700 people including smaller outlying settlements at Nearby Nasty Creek and Brewer's Lagoon.²⁰ The town was settled in 1699 by a young Englishman named William Pitt (no relation to the British politician). Pitt built himself a mansion forty miles up river, where he logged stands of fine red pine. Others soon followed and introduced sugar cane, cotton, maize and livestock. They produced provisions for Belize and traded with ladino merchants who travelled down the Black, Patuca, Aguan and Lean Rivers. The free market prices they offered brought trade from as far away as El Salvador. To

the south the Miskito extended the Black River trade in cattle, gold, cacao and tobacco deep up the familiar rivers of the Coast - the Coco, the Bluefields (the Escondido), and the San Juan. The enterprising Miskito were in their commercial trust - even trading with soldiers in outlying Spanish forts.²¹

All those involved in this mutually beneficial trade, which one senior Honduran official in the mid-eighteenth century estimated to be worth three million pesos a year (a figure, no doubt inflated for propaganda purposes), freely intermixed - with the exception, of course, of the Spanish tax collectors.²² The Miskito were willing to set aside their hatred of the Spanish as long as the price was right. Like thriving Belize, Black River was regarded by the Honduran Intendant, as a "warehouse of our misfortune and sponge of our mines."²³

The rage of the Spanish authorities at the contraband proclivities of ordinary people focused upon the Miskito Indians. Matias de Galvez, the military commander-in-chief of Central America, and future viceroy of New Spain, suffered humiliation at his failure to overcome the Miskito. In his dispatches to Madrid, he noted:

Send me mastiffs. With these huge dogs I will hunt down every Zambo [as the Spanish called the Miskito because of their mixed Indian-African ancestries] between Trujillo and Bluefields.²⁴

Contraband trading on the Matina Coast proved to be a chronic problem for the Spanish. The trade survived the ill

feelings caused by the slave raids and pillaging of Miskito warriors, and by the rarer attacks on the interlopers by the governors of Costa Rica. Even the efforts of the Spanish Crown to establish legal, tax-free trade between the Matina Coast and Cartago, late in the century, had little effect. Illegal trade prospered because a coalition of interests profited - the English, especially those from Punta Gorda on the Mosquito Coast; the Miskito Indians; and the Matina planters.

Despite the outward appearance of a flawless relationship, conflicts between the Miskito and their English cohorts did occur. After 1740, the main source of this friction centered on the slave raids. The British were eager to put an end to them because Indian slaves were no longer required and they did not want to further antagonize the Spaniards. Modern writers such as Naylor, Dozier and Conzemius, believed that the slaving expeditions of the Miskito into areas controlled by Spanish settlers were most probably initiated by the English. Again, this is only a half-truth. As has been demonstrated previously, the Miskito carried out slave raids against neighboring indigenous populations prior to European intervention.²⁵ The sociological and economic benefits of this traffic already had been established. The anonymous M. W.'s account indicates that by 1699 Miskito raids had reached beyond the feared "wild Indians", who lived on their borders, into Costa Rica and into the cacao plantations established by the

Spaniards in the Matina district. The Miskito launched surprise night raids, stealing cacao, killing Spaniards, and "many times carry[ing] away many of their Indians, of which they kill the men, but the women and boys they reserve to trade with to the Jaimaca-men."²⁶

This passage reveals that by the late seventeenth century Miskito commerce in human captives with the English was a factor in at least some of their raids. During the opening decades of the eighteenth century Miskito raiding depended upon the market for slaves provided by Jamaica and by European residents on the Mosquito Coast. Documents, letters, and reports written by Spanish clergy and government officials in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, provide useful information regarding these devastating raids, particularly during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The Miskito no longer confined their activities to raiding their immediate Indian neighbors. They ventured further into the Spanish frontier in the central mountains of Honduras and Nicaragua, into the Peten and the coast of Yucatan, and to the south along the coast of Costa Rica, where they ravaged not only the cacao plantations of Matina, but also the Talamancan region, Almirante Bay, and the Island of Tojar (Bocas del Toro).²⁷

Although slavers maintained a clear preference for capturing women and children, the Miskitos no longer killed all adult male captives, but sometimes held them for months and years in captivity, or even allowed them to go free.

Women were still kept by the raiders for their own domestic use, but many hundreds of captives were now sold to the British for the Jamaican slave market or to foreign settlers on the Mosquito Coast. The success of the Miskito in their assaults on Spanish territories may have been due to the poor military preparedness of the frontier Spanish regions and to the surprise element of the raids. By then, the Miskito had enjoyed access to European guns and ammunition for over fifty years and they were proficient marksmen. In addition, Miskito raiders received occasional assistance from native allies of the Spanish interior, who conducted attacks and shared in the spoils.²⁸

After 1740 the frequency of Miskito raids declined because Indian slaves were no longer demanded by the large sugar estates in Jamaica. Their owners became rich enough to purchase preferred African slave labor.²⁹ To argue, as Troy S. Floyd has, that the English "induced the Miskito to end raids for Indian slaves," is to ignore the economic realities of supply and demand.³⁰ The Miskito simply limited their slave raids because the high demand for slaves was no longer present.

The Miskito raids also affected Spanish attempts to establish missions in the interior. As already noted, many frontier towns and villages were relocated away from the border-lands in the early 1700's because of Miskito raids. This hampered missionary work since the friars experienced difficulties in keeping contact with, and converting, the

Indian tribes. These missionaries branded the Miskito as the "scourge of the coast" who "snatched infants from the breasts of their mothers and hurled them into the rivers."³¹

Despite previous setbacks and the inherent risk of renewed attacks by the Miskito, the missions were revived in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1737, Governor Carandi y Menan of Costa Rica, urged the Recollects to establish their missions in the frontier. In his view the Talamancan tribes feared enslavement by the Miskito and would welcome the protection that could be offered by Spanish priests and soldiers.³² The priests were soon reporting great successes, but in truth, hundreds of involuntary Indian converts awaited any opportunity to escape the mission system imposed by the Spaniards. They would not have to wait long.

As early as 1743, a force of one-hundred and fifty Miskito warriors attacked the Indian village of Jinotega and carried off forty of its two-hundred inhabitants. In 1747, Muy Muy Viejo was similarly invaded. In 1749, the Miskito returned to Muy Muy Viejo, and continued to assault Lovajo, Camoapa, and Boaco Viejo.³³ If the Miskito attacks were not sufficient impetus to deter the Spanish mission movement, in 1750-52 epidemics followed that swept through the frontier towns terminating or severely limiting the activities of the friars. Expressing his frustrations with the missionary movement, Bishop Agustin Morel de Santa Cruz of Nicaragua reported: "... how can we consider supporting missions, especially when the Indians either die in them or run from

them?"³⁴ It was little consolation to the Spanish Recollects that in 1748 the Miskito themselves ignored an attempt by the Church of England to convert them. On both sides, the missionary movement was put on indefinite hold.

Despite the continued intermittent raids, the Miskito managed to increase their trade with the ladinos of the interior. This was necessary in order for the Miskito to maintain an accustomed level of lifestyle produced by the slave trade. To further their economic success the native leaders sought a treaty with the Spanish commander of Fort San Felipe which was located at the mouth of the Gulf of Honduras. "Written in good English" the proposed treaty stated that the Miskito wanted to be received as good friends at Trujillo where they would trade for cattle, horses, and tobacco.³⁵ Not surprisingly, the Spaniards rejected the offer. Spanish officials were not as quick as the Miskito to put aside differences in the name of profit.

From 1739 to 1748, the British and the Spanish were engaged in the War of Jenkins' Ear, and by this time, the Spanish were thoroughly cognizant of the mounting danger on the Coast. During the 1740's they attempted, but failed, to organize a campaign to drive the British out. Unfortunately for the Spanish, they believed that the British on the Coast posed a far greater challenge than did the Miskito Indians. Their mistake became obvious on August 13, 1747, when a force of 200 Miskito warriors and English soldiers attacked and burned Fort San Fernando de Matina to the ground.³⁶

The destruction of the fort, and the peace that ended the War of Jenkin's Ear in 1748, led to a resumption of normal contraband activity along the Matina Coast by the Miskito and English. However, in 1754, the Spanish government appointed a new governor of Costa Rica. Assuming command, Francisco Fernandez de la Pastora determined to rid the Matina Coast of all traces of Miskito or English traders. In June of 1756 he received a supply of five hundred muskets. For two weeks his forces awaited the next expedition of contrabandists to arrive. Unfortunately for his cause, the Miskito had him under much closer surveillance than he had the contrabandists. On July 2, Miskito raiders attacked Fernandez de la Pastora's troops and defeated them completely. The natives seized most of the Spanish arms and even managed to capture the governor and his lieutenant.³⁷ Both were executed later. Clearly, the Miskito - independent of the British - were able to raise significant military forces in their defense.

As noted previously in this chapter, Governor Manuel Soler, who replaced Fernandez de la Pastora, gained a measure of revenge for Spain in 1759 when his troops slaughtered seventy-two Miskito and English traders on the Matina Coast as they slept. The reciprocal attacks continued in 1762 during the Seven Years' War when a group of Miskito warriors, aided by their Yarrince Indian allies, again assaulted Spanish territories. In one attack on Matina they carried off twenty-four prisoners; in another, they sacked and burned

three towns south of the Bluefields River.³⁸

Meanwhile, Spain and England came to terms in 1763 in the Peace of Paris following Spain's disastrous wartime participation. Article 17 of the peace treaty guaranteed that the magnanimous British would demolish "all the fortifications which His [Majesty's] subjects shall have erected in the Bay of Honduras, and other places of the Territory of Spain."³⁹ However, when the British government sent a ship to the Mosquito Coast to dismantle the fort at Black River, the ship was sent back by the superintendent with the word that "Black River and the coast are not Spanish soil, and thus the treaty does not apply to them."⁴⁰

The Spanish authorities in Guatemala sent Lieutenant Colonel Diez Navarro to take possession of the Black River settlement in the name of Carlos III of Spain, but Superintendent Joseph Otway declined on the grounds that he was only the "protector" of British subjects there and that the Miskito Indians controlled their own affairs. The Miskito rejected Navarro's claim of Spanish sovereignty over the Coast. They expressed their determination to keep their homeland free and autonomous. At one point, Navarro had to seek refuge from the enraged Indians in William Pitt's house. He and his party escaped their own massacre by leaving preceptiously the next day.⁴¹ For the first time (but certainly not the last) the Miskito illustrated their willingness to defend their land from the unwanted intrusions of a foreign power.

Some modern historians missed the significance of these events. Robert A. Naylor concluded that the expulsion of the Spanish from Black River guaranteed that the settlement "remained firmly in the hands of the Mosquito Indians and their British protectors."⁴² The truth of the matter is that if anybody was being "protected" on the Coast, it was the English and not the Miskito. The dependence of the English on their Indian allies has been demonstrated. The British required Miskito assistance to end the nagging Maroon War. The English logcutters in Belize had to escape to Black River where they sought Miskito protection. Miskito warriors provided the necessary vigor and strength in the annihilation of Fort San Fernando de Matina. In addition, in 1720, a large force of Miskito Indians met and defeated a number of Spanish coast guard vessels off the Coast of Honduras, sinking one and scattering the rest. Only three years later, the Miskito again crushed Spanish forces in the same waters, killing one hundred and seventy-one sailors. The security of the Coast, therefore, depended not on support from Jamaica, but on the Miskito themselves. The English historian Edward Long wrote of the Miskito in 1774 and concluded:

They have been, and still are, in the place of a standing army; which, without receiving any pay, or being in any shape burthensome to Great Britain, maintains the English, ... protects their trade, and forms an impenetrable barrier against the Spaniards, whom they keep in constant awe.⁴³

Despite their military prowess and concerns for independence, the Miskito suffered attempts at exploitation

by unscrupulous individuals. In the 1770's a group of settlers in Black River became interested in the future prospects of the Mosquito Coast. Eight residents of the settlement gambled that the British government planned to make the Coast an official colony. Previous English settlers in that community generally acquired lands for their private use through grants from the Miskito chiefs, notably from the general who commanded the Black River district and from the Miskito king who exercised sovereignty over the entire Coast. Not wanting to alert any competitors, the eight promoters engaged in the covert acquisition of large tracts of land south of the Black River district from the Miskito king, George I. They hoped thereby to gain possession of much of the land that would be desired for future colonizing purposes. The Miskito king was given many gifts in order to garner his support.⁴⁴

When news of the attempted scheme reached the ears of the new superintendent on the Coast, Robert Hodgson, Jr. - the first superintendent's son - he concluded that the speculators had cheated the Indians out of their lands. His main function as superintendent was, after all, to secure the best possible relationship with the Miskito people and to ensure their continued alliance with Great Britain. Hodgson worried that once the Miskito realized the true extent of the land grants under consideration, they would hold the British government responsible for the landgrab. On April 5, 1770, Hodgson unilaterally proclaimed authority over all lands and

possessions of the Miskito Indians. He announced that all titles to land claims would be reviewed by him and only valid grants registered. He added that in order to protect the welfare of the Indians, no future gifts or grants of land from the Indians would be valid without his approval.⁴⁵

Hodgson may have believed he had acted in the best interest of the Miskito, but he underestimated their entrepreneurial acumen. The Poya Indians occupied the territory under consideration. The Miskito king, George I, would continue to receive tribute from this subject people no matter who claimed actual possession of the land. If the Poya were forced off the land by the English, they would still be under Miskito control.

Both the Miskito and the land promoters expressed outrage at Hodgson's claim of authority. In 1774, the speculators brought formal charges against Hodgson, accusing him of using his position to monopolize much of the trade at Black River. The next year, George I sent his son to London along with a delegation of the promoters in order to protest Hodgson's actions. By the time the Miskito prince returned to the Coast the following year, he had become, on his father's death, King George II. Hodgson received a recall notice shortly thereafter. However, by this time, the project was well known and the chances of its success were greatly diminished. In addition, rumors of war with Spain circulated once again adding to the risk of such a venture. The project was dropped for the time being but reappeared in

the early nineteenth century under a different guise, and with different promoters.⁴⁶

George II's return from London to the Mosquito Coast did not proceed as planned because a Spanish coast guard vessel intercepted his ship. The viceroy of New Granada believed that the ship conveyed the first contingent of colonists to the Coast. After realizing that no colonists were on board, the captain set the crew ashore and held on to his richest prize, the young king. George II was taken to Cartagena where he was showered with gifts and assured that the Spanish wanted nothing more than his friendship. They urged him to sign a treaty with them but he refused as his loyalty to the English was unassailable.⁴⁷ Subsequent actions by the Spanish suggests their belief that with a negotiator in whom the Indians had confidence, they could bring the Miskito over as possible allies.

The first Spanish experiment to use such an agent proved unsuccessful. Colville Cairns, an Irishman trading with the Miskito Indians at Bocas del Toro, offered his services to the Spanish regime but he was unable to get Governor Briton, the dissatisfied leader of the southern Miskito territory, to sign a treaty. In London during 1777, Jeremiah Terry, an American who had lived on the Coast for many years met the Spanish Ambassador to London, the Marquis of Almodovar, and travelled to Madrid to talk with the Spanish Minister of the Indies, Jose de Galvez. Terry received Galvez's full support and left Bilbao with a full crew and a shipload of gifts for

the Miskito. Secrecy was paramount for the success of the mission. The crew memorized security signs and countersigns, and the captain general of Guatemala, and governors of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, received orders to give Terry every possible aid.⁴⁸

Terry reached the mouth of the San Juan River in August of 1778 where he arranged to meet with a party of leading Miskito representatives including: the king; governor; general; and admiral. Negotiations were under way when word reached the Miskito leaders that Carlos Matias Yarrince, the chief of their Yarrince Indian allies, had been arrested by Nicaraguan officials. Yarrince warriors expressed anger at the arrest and begged the Miskito warriors for revenge. Shortly thereafter, Miskito raiders massacred Terry and nearly all of his crew. Only two soldiers escaped the Miskito atrocity. Two years later, soldiers from a Costa Rican reconnaissance mission viewed the weathered remains of the skulls "split as if by the blow of a saber."⁴⁹ Once more, the Miskito displayed their commitment to independence of action, regardless of the possible negative effects. And once again, the British in the area realized the importance of maintaining a close alliance with the Miskito, especially in a period of impending war.

The much anticipated war broke out in 1779 when Spain joined forces with France against England and launched a determined offensive to drive the British out of the Caribbean. They struck first at the English logcutters in

Belize and took one-hundred and forty prisoners. The remaining British population withdrew to the protection afforded by Black River. In retaliation, the British launched an assault on the newly constructed Spanish fort at Omoa. Over one-hundred Miskito warriors eagerly joined the attack force. The British fired artillery at the fortress by sea while a contingent of soldiers, led by the aggressive Miskito warriors, sloshed through the swamps in order to launch a surprise attack by land on the fort. The Miskito proved to be too much for the besieged garrison of the Spanish fort. The bravery and skill which the Indians displayed in hand-to-hand combat inspired their British allies to follow them over the ramparts and into the fort. Meanwhile, the British ships in the port captured two Spanish vessels carrying cargo worth three million pesos.⁵⁰ Once Spanish reinforcements finally arrived the British and the Miskito prudently deserted the fortress.

Encouraged by the easy success of the Fort Omoa raid, the British planned another offensive up the San Juan River. Their first objective was the capture of Fort Immaculada which English observers believed would grant them easy access to Lake Nicaragua and the riches of Granada. However, the campaign was headed by individuals who were unfamiliar with the difficult conditions on the Coast. The force left Jamaica in March of 1780 under the command of Captain John Polson. The assault was a disaster despite the heroic efforts of the Miskito and an unknown young Captain named

Horatio Nelson. Early on, the British force gained morale by the quick capture of a Spanish garrison half-way to the fort. Nelson and a group of Miskito warriors swiftly overcame the sixteen Spanish defenders and five stonethrowers.⁵¹ The rest of the mission did not go as smoothly. Eventually the English reached Fort Imaculada but found the situation difficult. The artillery barrage which opened the first day of battle set the pattern of conflict for the next eighteen days. The Miskito soon grew bored with siege warfare and especially resented orders to dig trenches or to recover used cannonballs. The English commanders failed to realize the potential of their Miskito allies and lost an important advantage. Many Miskito warriors drifted downstream because the promised battle failed to materialize.

The British managed to take the fort, but it proved to be a waste of time because the Spanish used the interval to build another blockade at the entrance to the lake. The British were left without allies and many soldiers died or suffered from the effects of yellow fever and malaria. To make matters worse, English reinforcements which arrived at the mouth of the San Juan River also experienced the ill effects of tropical diseases. The commander of this force, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Kemble, reported to the Governor of Jamaica that less than seventy of his troops were fit for duty. "Even these," he said, "cannot stand six hours duty.... their limbs are swollen to an enormous size, and fountains of water issue from their legs."⁵² With the

situation hopeless, the British had no option other than to withdraw.

In 1781, with momentum on their side, the Spanish assembled a large force at Trujillo and launched an attack against the Black River settlement. They set the town ablaze, destroyed the sugar mills, spiked the artillery, and forced the evacuation of English and Miskito inhabitants. The Spanish did not occupy the town and shortly thereafter the settlers and Indians returned to rebuild it. The interval of peace for the settlement was short, however, because the Spaniards returned in April 1782. This time they intended to remain. A two-pronged attack from the sea and the land proved effective in capturing Fort Dalling and the nearby Black River settlement. Unfortunately for the Spanish, they failed to capture a significant number of inhabitants, the majority of whom escaped in small boats through the maze of salt lagoons which the Miskito knew so well. In addition, many of the Spanish soldiers who attempted to surprise the settlement by land, fell ill from yellow fever and malaria. Spanish forces suffered constant harassment by Miskito warriors who employed guerilla-type tactics in the dense foliage of the swamps.⁵³

Despite these conditions, the Spanish managed to successfully retain possession of Black River for four months. By then, the Miskito general in charge of the region, possessing the unlikely name of John Smith, thirsted for revenge against the enemies who dared to occupy his

territory. A four hundred man force of Miskito warriors joined by a few English soldiers launched an action that became known as the "Quepriva massacre." Quepriva (Fort Dalling) was defended by a weak garrison of thirty-three Spanish soldiers. In the ensuing slaughter, only one Spanish soldier escaped the wrath of the Miskito.⁵⁴ The reconquest of Fort Dalling allowed the British and Miskito to reoccupy Black River in late August, 1782, with a combined force of one thousand men. Once again, the alliance of Miskito and British proved effective and profitable.

By this time, the Spanish resigned themselves to the presence of Miskito and British forces on the Mosquito Coast. For more than a year, the belligerents faced each other across the short distance that separated Black River from Trujillo. In Europe, Spain and England were war weary and ready to commence peace negotiations. The Miskito and the Englishmen living on the Coast shared the feelings of exhaustion and wanted to restore trade to the levels attained before the conflict. Neither party was aware of the grave repercussions the resultant Treaty of Versailles would have for them. The treaty was signed in September, 1783, and resembled closely the 1763 Treaty of Paris. In particular, Article 6 stipulated that the British would evacuate any Spanish territory they occupied in the Bay of Honduras, and that the British would be allowed to continue cutting logwood in Belize.⁵⁵

The Englishmen living on the Coast were furious. Years

of hard work and perseverance appeared to have been annihilated by the stroke of a pen. Under the terms of the treaty they were to be relocated to a strictly defined area in Belize where logwood reserves had been seriously depleted. Furthermore, no mention of the rich mahogany stands were made in the treaty, thereby ensuring friction with the Spanish over contraband trade. In addition, many of the wiser settlers realized that they would not be protected by the Miskito in their new location across the Bay of Honduras. When confronted by these strong objections, the negotiators in London attempted to resolve them.

Spanish negotiators expressed a willingness to alter the treaty because they hoped to recover Gibraltar in exchange for further concessions. But Gibraltar was worth much more than the logwood trade - leaving the negotiations to drag on for three years. Finally, the Spanish agreed to extend the area in Belize and to include mahogany in the treaty in return for a British promise to immediately evacuate all settlements, and destroy all fortifications on the Coast.⁵⁶

Both parties signed the Anglo-Spanish Convention on July 14, 1786. The effects were immediate. Over two thousand English settlers evacuated the Coast and resettled at Belize. The Miskito Indians felt betrayed. Would they be able to stop the advance of Spain by themselves? For ninety-nine years they had sacrificed their blood willingly for causes in association with their English allies. The bonds of loyalty which they felt, forged through years of trading, fighting

and learning, were made of a solid material. Despite continued loyalty shown by the few remaining Englishmen, it was made apparent that two different mindsets were at work. But a bigger game of alliances and power politics was being played in Europe. In London, far removed from the Coast and their old Miskito allies, the British government expressed a willingness to abandon the Miskito to Spanish devices. Meanwhile, the Miskito waited. Would their friends return? And if they did, could the British be trusted?

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ William Shakespeare, As You Like It, (New York: Signet Ltd., 1974), p. 36.

² "Correspondence Respecting Central and South America," British Parliamentary Papers - Area Studies: Spanish America, (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971), II, p. 121.

³ M. W., p. 288.

⁴ The governor suspected that the escaped pirates might try to establish a government on the coast which would act in the interest of buccaneers. Sir Hans Sloane, p. 26.

⁵ Edwin Morisby, "The British Main - On the Mosquito Coast," Quadrant, XI, (1986), p. 23.

⁶ Cited in Olien, p. 206.

⁷ "Correspondence Respecting Central and South America," British Parliamentary Studies, Area Studies: Spanish America, p. 145.

⁸ Ibid, p. 148

⁹ Edward Long, The History of Jamaica, (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1970), p. 220. Originally written in 1774.

¹⁰ "Certain Documents in Relation to Central America," United States Senate Documents, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, (Washington D.C., 1853), Document no. 27, p. 117.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 117.

¹² Naylor, p. 46.

¹³ The position of admiral had been used by minor Miskito chiefs in the area but was elevated to an important

title by the Miskito king. See "Ramiro to Palma," AGCA, A1.2, leg. 125, exp. 374, (22.9.1754).

¹⁴ The reason why so many historians, geographers, and anthropologists claim that the British participated in Miskito politics has to do with the later influence of the ubiquitous E. G. Squier - a former American consul in Central America. In the mid-nineteenth century, Squier attempted to discredit the British role in Central America in order to establish American rights to construct an interoceanic canal through Nicaragua. He published several flagrantly inaccurate books which, unfortunately, came to be viewed as legitimate sources. When some observers caught on to his tactics, Squier continued with his smear campaign by publishing under the pseudonym Samuel A. Bard. For an example, see E. G. Squier, Nicaragua, Its People, Scenery, Monuments, and the Proposed Interoceanic Canal, 2 vols., (New York: D. Appleton and Co.), 1852; and Samuel A. Bard, Waikna; Or Adventures on the Mosquito Shore, (New York: Harper and Brothers), 1855.

¹⁵ Hertslet's Commercial Treaties, ed. Lewis Hertslet, Esq., III, (London: Butterworth's, 1864), p. 327.

¹⁶ Floyd, pp. 26-28.

¹⁷ "Captain Ramirez to Governor, July 12, 1730," AGCA, A1.12, leg. 39, exp. 4213.

¹⁸ Cited in Naylor, p. 50. Curiously enough, the Miskito received the sarsaparilla as tribute from the Poya and did not value it much themselves, but at the time, the

British believed it was a cure for syphilis.

¹⁹ "Governor to Captain General, July 18, 1759," Coleccion de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica, ed. Leon Fernandez, IV, (San Jose, Costa Rica: 1885), p. 156. Hereafter referred to as CDHCR.

²⁰ This information is provided by a Spanish spy. See "Statement of Juan de Lara y Ortega, Caomayagua, Sept. 18, 1759," Boletin del Archivo General del Gobierno, V, (Guatemala City: 1940), pp. 137-142. Hereafter referred to as BAGG.

²¹ Cited in Peter Day, "Miskito Power: Back on the British Main," Quadrant, 18, (1988), p. 29.

²² "Espinosa to Governor, December 23, 1752," AGCA, A1.17, leg. 335, exp. 7088.

²³ "Intendant to Captain General, Comayagua, July 1, 1798," BAGG, VI, p. 303.

²⁴ "Galvez to Crown, August 20, 1779," AGCA, A1.12, leg. 50, exp. 511.

²⁵ See this thesis, Chapter 2, p.6.

²⁶ M. W., p. 288.

²⁷ "Governor to Captain General, Cartago, September 5, 1738," CDHCR, IV, p. 93.

²⁸ Mary Helms, "Miskito Slaving and Culture Contact: Ethnicity and Opportunity in an Expanding Population," Journal of Anthropological Research, 39, (1983), p. 182.

Helms argues that the major impetus for increased Miskito raids "lay in the dynamics of Miskito population growth" but

fails to adequately demonstrate this. Rather, her evidence tends to confirm that Miskito slaving patterns prior to 1700 belong to a traditional mode while those carried out after this date were increasingly a result of an economic demand created by English slave traders.

²⁹ See R. B. Sheridan, Sugar and Slavery. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 217-218.

³⁰ Floyd, p. 67.

³¹ "Governor to Crown, Cartago, August 20, 1738," CDHCR, IX, p. 296.

³² "Governor to Captain General, July, 12, 1737," CDHCR IX, p. 330.

³³ "Informe of Archbishop Francisco Jose Figuerdo y Victoria, Santiago de Guatemala, July 27, 1752," AGCA, A1.17, leg. 118, exp. 2487.

³⁴ "Bishop Morel to Captain General, April 15, 1752," AGCA, A1.17, leg 223, exp. 454.

³⁵ "Governor to Captain General, February 17, 1749," AGCA, A1.12, leg. 72, exp. 2044.

³⁶ Jose Dolores Gamez, Historia de la costa de Mosquitos hasta 1894, (Managua, Nicaragua: Talleres Nacionales, 1939), p. 218. Gamez's book should be used with caution because of the obvious pro-Nicaraguan stance it takes regarding Miskito autonomy.

³⁷ Gamez, p. 224.

³⁸ This information is provided by a Carib Indian, earlier converted by missionaries, who helped the Miskito to

defeat the Spanish. See "Declaration of Carlos Antonio Yarrince, Leon, Sept. 9, 1768," BAGG, pp. 123-125.

³⁹ Hetslet's Commercial Treaties, X, p. 183.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Floyd, p. 117.

⁴¹ Gamez, p. 251.

⁴² Naylor, p. 55.

⁴³ Long, p. 303.

⁴⁴ Naylor, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁵ Alfred Hasbrouck, "Gregor MacGregor and the Colonization of Poyais between 1820 and 1824," Hispanic American Historical Review, VII, (1927), p.439.

⁴⁶ Hasbrouck, pp. 438-59.

⁴⁷ "Reconnaissance of the Mosquito Coast by Fernandez Javier de Vargas, Cartagena, June 6, 1776," CDHCR, X, p. 305.

⁴⁸ "Captain General to Governor of Costa Rica, Nueva Guatemala, June 22, 1778," CDHCR, X, p. 331.

⁴⁹ Remember that in 1762, the Yarrince helped the Miskito attack Spanish frontier positions. For the report by the Costa Rican soldiers, see "Statement of Captain Joseph Miguel Cardenas, September 23, 1780," AGCA, A1.17, leg. 431, exp. 1453.

⁵⁰ Cited in Floyd, p. 139.

⁵¹ "Crown to Captain General, March 31, 1778," AGCA, A1.12, leg. 50, exp. 508.

⁵² Stephen Kemble, The Kemble Papers, (New York: New York Historical Society, 1894), II, p. 537.

⁵³ William S. Sorsby, "Spanish Colonization of the

Mosquito Coast, 1787-1800," Revista de Historia de America, 73, (1972), p. 146.

54 The lone survivor's testimony is recorded in "Statement of Manuel Rivas, August 19, 1782," AGCA, A1.17, leg. 442, exp. 85.

55 Hertslet's Commercial Treaties, vol. 11, p. 46.

56 For a discussion of the importance of Gibraltar in the treaty negotiations, see Conwell A. Anderson, "Anglo-Spanish Negotiations Involving Central America in 1783," in Militarists, Merchants, and Missionaries: United States Expansion in Middle America, ed., Eugene R. Huck and Edward H. Moseley, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1970), pp. 23-37.

Chapter 4 - "Reconciliation and the Second Betrayal"

Kati painkira uli aula
 Touan kanra ingni dauki
 Upla manus yangra wise
 Yawon wol kli aisabia apia

Sarikira iwi luki
 Kankara ni iwi lukanma

The full moon is rising
 Making the village bright
 Everyone tells me
 We will not speak together
 again.
 Disconsolate I sit and think
 Above all else I will sit
 and think.

Excerpt from a traditional Miskito
 love song.¹

In 1786 British leaders abandoned their support of economic investments in the Mosquito Coast. British merchants and investors in the area feared that this would result in the termination of Miskito loyalty and support. English residents of the Coast were perplexed and disheartened by the move. Many of them believed that the British government had been persuaded to abandon them because of pressure by West Indian plantation interests, fearful of competition from the continental coast. The settlers alleged that these interests propagated "false and malicious reports about its adverse climate, unhealthy conditions, and unproductive soils." Island plantation owners wished to turn the British government and public opinion against further support of settling the Coast.² West Indian interests may have applied pressure tactics in order to sway members of the government, but in many respects these negative reports were not overly exaggerated. Potential settlers and investors confronted truly harsh conditions on the Coast. Persistent

year round rain, yellow fever, malaria, other tropical diseases, and leached or sandy soils were realities that confronted all those who wished to tame the Mosquito Coast.

Nevertheless, the 1786 Anglo-Spanish Convention obliged most of the 3,000 British residents, from Black River to Bluefields, to evacuate. For the majority, the destination was Belize, but a few went to Jamaica and other British Caribbean Islands. A very small number, including Robert Hodgson, Jr., the former superintendent of Black River from 1768 to 1776, remained behind if they swore loyalty to Spain.

Although Spanish authorities rejected the British argument that territorial sovereignty implied occupation and administrative control, during the next four years the Spaniards attempted to colonize the vacated areas of the Mosquito Coast and to eliminate the hostility of the Miskito Indians. Unfortunately for Spain - and for the independent Nicaragua to follow - neither method secured control of the area. It proved easier to convince colonists from Spain and the Canary Islands to settle than it was to assure their security in their new homes. The Spaniards planned to distribute approximately 1,000 Spanish colonists in Bluefields, Cape Gracias a Dios, and Black River.³ As it turned out, these places attracted very few individuals because of Miskito hostility, and those who settled at the cape and Black River, close to the garrisons for safety, were soon driven out along with the soldiers. They could produce little food on the sandy coastal soils where they were

confined, and depended upon food shipments paid at government expense. Even so, they fell prey to disease. Contrary to Spanish objectives, most of the colonists who came and stayed remained in Trujillo.

In their campaign to win the friendship of the Miskito, the Spanish tried to use the influence of Robert Hodgson, Jr. The Spaniards permitted Hodgson to remain at Bluefields and to continue his profitable planting and trading. Since the Spanish failed to establish a military presence in the area by 1787, they appointed Hodgson governor of the Nicaraguan Mosquito Shore and granted him wide powers. His talent, reputation, and respect from the Miskito, enabled him to negotiate with the Indians on behalf of the Spanish. Many of the British settlers in Belize labelled Hodgson a turncoat because of his apparent subservience to the Spanish, but in reality, he may have been doing the British a great favor. His continued presence on the shore continued good relations between the British and Miskito - opening the possibilities of a British return. Also, Hodgson was effective in keeping the Spanish out of the area and he proved himself "unable" to secure a permanent treaty with the Miskito on behalf of the Spanish.⁴

Thus thwarted, the Spanish took matters into their own hands. They tried to play on the rivalry which existed between the Miskito king, George II, and the Miskito leader of the southern district, Governor Breton. Breton had long hated the king because George II monopolized the gifts

received from the British. Although the Miskito governor was allowed to exercise virtually independent power over Miskito and Carib Indians from Sandy Bay to Bluefields, Breton received only those gifts that George permitted. Governor Breton, like George II, responded to Spanish overtures during the Terry Mission, but both leaders participated in the massacre of the Spaniards following the report of Yarrince's capture. At any rate, both men accepted invitations to Cartagena where they received many honors and gifts amid great festivity. King George II accepted the gifts, but refused to give his allegiance to Spain. He could not relinquish his underlying hatred of the Spaniards. Too many Miskito warriors had perished at Spanish hands. George exhibited his true loyalties by flying a Union Jack from the stern of his boat when he sailed home.⁵ Despite Britain's abandonment, his attachment remained.

Governor Breton proved to be more pliable. Unlike King George who was accustomed to gifts, he felt flattered with the showy uniform given to him by the Spanish. Years later, the American trader, Orlando Roberts saw Breton's uniform worn by his brother, Clemente. Roberts noted:

He was dressed in an old Spanish uniform, of blue cloth with red collar and facings, decorated with a great profusion of tarnished gold lace; an old embroidered white satin vest, ornamented with spangles, and having large pocket holes with flaps; a pair of old white kerseymere breeches; white cotton stockings; shoes, with silver buckles; and, a large goldheaded cane.⁶

In addition, Breton became infatuated with a young

Spanish girl who had been captured in an earlier raid on the frontier. Used by the Spanish to win him over, he first took her as his concubine, but after his conversion to the Catholic faith he promised to marry her. The Spanish had always believed that if the Indians could be converted to Catholicism, their hostility would cease. In theory, the marriage of a converted Miskito chief to a Spanish Catholic seemed certain to accomplish this end. But it was not to be.

On July 6, 1788, the archbishop of Cartagena, Juan Antonio Caballero de Gongora, baptized Governor Breton and gave him a new name, Carlos Antonio de Castilla. In token of his new loyalty, Breton now carried the names of the king of Spain and the archbishop-viceroy of New Granada, names symbolizing the great hope of the Spanish, who believed that the new Don Carlos held in his hands the key to the Mosquito Coast. Not wanting to overlook continued support in the future, they also baptized Carlos' son on the same day and arranged for him to be educated in Spain.⁷

Don Carlos returned to the Coast while his young fiance waited and prepared for their marriage in Leon. For the first time, Spanish missionaries were allowed to venture into a portion of the Mosquito Coast. Don Carlos greeted them heartily and proclaimed that, "Jesus Christ has given us our land, but he did not give us tools and firearms which we need."⁸ Apparently Carlos did not allow his conversion to Catholicism to get in the way of his own future plans of controlling the Coast. Meanwhile, Don Carlos' young fiance

began to have second thoughts about the impending marriage. To leave civilization and return to the wild Coast, to marry the old chief who beat her when he was drunk, seemed repulsive as the marriage drew near. Realizing the potentially enormous benefits which the marriage could have for Spain and the missionary movement, Bishop Villegas of Nicaragua convinced her that the marriage must take place. Eventually, the young girl acquiesced and in January, 1789 the union took place in Leon amidst much pomp and ceremony.⁹

Now firmly in the Spanish camp, Don Carlos returned to the Mosquito Coast accompanied by his new wife. The Spanish hoped this would be the beginning of Indian pacification in that troublesome region; however, it soon became apparent that Don Carlos did not exert the powerful influence that was expected of him. The reaction on the Coast to his marriage and conversion was exceedingly negative. King George II used the intervening time to tighten his grip at the cape by assassinating several headmen who appeared to challenge his supremacy. In order to assure his position against the likely usurper, Don Carlos, George prompted Admiral Dilson, the leader of the far-southern stretch of the kingdom, to move against Carlos.¹⁰

Returning to his home at Taupi, Don Carlos encountered rebellions among his subordinate Miskito chiefs. Immediately, he appealed to the Spanish for assistance but he received, as he said, "only a pinch of powder and a handful of shot."¹¹ Eventually, his bride and the missionaries

abandoned him. And with no following among his own people, members of Admiral Dilson's force hunted him down and shot him. A short while thereafter, Dilson forced Robert Hodgson, Jr. to flee from the Coast to Leon. Once again, this was the Miskito's answer to Spanish incursions.

The entire Don Carlos debacle produced important repercussions for the Miskito. For many years they had acknowledged differences between the Indians of the north and the south. The Miskito Indians north and west of Sandy Bay tended to have a pronounced African appearance due to their intermarriage with escaped slaves. The Miskito south of Sandy Bay were generally of a more pure Indian blood and possessed lighter colored skin and straighter hair. These two groups did not entirely trust each other, but acted in unison under the leadership of the king in times of trouble. The Don Carlos incident seemed to highlight these differences for King George II. His party continued its bid for supremacy and targeted the pure-blooded Indians, arguing that they could not be trusted because of their Spanish leanings. In the persecution which followed, over a dozen important Indian officers were killed, including Admiral Dilson. Following the purges, George formed a closer working relationship with the anti-Spanish leader of the north coast, General Robinson.¹²

Now united against the Spanish, the Miskito were prepared to launch another offensive in order to drive the Spaniards from their lands. As the eighteenth century ended

there were no further efforts by the Spaniards to control the Mosquito Coast. In fact, their defenses at Black River were deteriorating, as were those elsewhere in Central America. The colonies reflected Spain's weakness at home, its administrative ineptitude, and its involvement in the disastrous Napoleonic Wars. Signs of weakness were not wasted on King George III. In the summer of 1800 George and General Robinson launched an attack on the poorly defended Spanish garrison at Black River. The Miskito victory was complete and the Spaniards retreated to Trujillo.¹³ This was a significant victory for the Miskito because they regained control of their territory without any direct assistance from the British.

While these events transpired, the British government - itself suffering the effects of a long war - was not ready to join the Miskito in a full-scale attack on the Spanish. Although the evacuation of British colonists was almost complete, the British still occupied Belize and Jamaica. When it became apparent, by 1800, that the entire Coast beyond Trujillo to Bluefields and the San Juan River was neither effectively controlled nor settled by the Spaniards, a slow regress began. The British government notified Jamaican authorities in 1805 that friendly relations with the Miskito could be continued on an informal basis and that their services might be utilized surreptitiously against the Spanish. The British government realized that by using these approaches, it would give the appearance of not being

directly involved.¹⁴

Throughout the period after the 1786 treaty, entrepreneurs in Belize maintained their contacts with the Miskito on the Coast. As the war with Spain continued, they realized that their fledgling settlement was vulnerable to attack. The best possible counterbalance to this threat still rested with their old allies, the Miskito. For their part, the Indians did not give any indication that their alliance with the British ever had terminated. In 1800, King George II stopped in Belize to inform the British of his intention to retake Black River. In 1802, to demonstrate to the entrepreneurs that they should return to the Coast and resume the lumber trade, the Miskito sent the leaders of the Belize settlement a large dugout canoe hewn from the trunk of a single mahogany tree.¹⁵

In 1803 the leading residents of Belize voted to restore the alliance with the Miskito, and in the following year, a party was sent from Belize to present gifts to the leading Miskito chiefs. Moreover, after some critical years, the internal situation on the Coast began to stabilize. Of great importance, King George II was dead. His brutal policies and sometimes cruel treatment of his own people generated an increasing resentment among them. After the murder of one of his wives in 1800, a riot erupted in his village during which George was shot and killed.¹⁶ However, among the Miskito there was no adult leader to take George's place. The previous lines of kingship passed, for the most part, from

father to son. But now the logical heir to the throne was only about seven years old. George's brother, Stephen, assumed the title of prince or king-regent and led the Miskito for at least part of the time George's two sons were sent to study in Jamaica. It seems clear that Stephen was never able to claim the office of king because General Robinson, the leader of the northern area of the Kingdom, was by this time very powerful, and would not permit Stephen to assume permanent office.

Under the regency, territorial divisions of the Mosquito Coast were reduced from four districts to three. The northern district centered as it had before on Black River, and now extended to the Patuca River in the east. This region remained under the command of the powerful General Robinson, who resided in a comfortable English style house on the banks of the Plantain River.¹⁷ He owned several Indian and Negro slaves, a small herd of cattle, and carried on a minor trade in products like sarsaparilla, which he obtained from the Poya Indians of the interior. Besides the numerous Poya natives, Robinson's precinct also included some Anglicized Black Caribs who had been relocated by the Spanish from Roatan.¹⁸

The central district extending from Caratasca to Sandy Bay was Prince Stephen's territory. He maintained two main residential sites - the first, at Sandy Bay for the turtle season, the other, inland behind Sandy Bay, about eighty kilometres up the Wanks River. The southern district

included the territory south of Brancmans Bluff to the Rio Grande. This area fell under the control of Governor Clementi, a pure-blooded Miskito Indian who assumed leadership after the murder of his brother, Governor Breton, alias Don Carlos. The governor's jurisdiction included the neighboring tribes of Towkas and Tongulas but it did not extend south to include Pearl Lagoon and Bluefields. These areas reverted to the control of minor Miskito chiefs.¹⁹

On November 14, 1815, a gathering of Miskito leaders decided that George Frederick, George II's oldest son, had matured enough to take over the leadership of the kingdom. All of the leaders signed an oath of submission to George Frederick as rightful heir. Because Belize now began to exert greater influence over the Coast than Jamaica, George Frederick wrote to Sir George Arthur, superintendent of Honduras, asking if he could be crowned at Belize. On January 14, 1816, Arthur replied in favor of the request and suggested that the coronation take place on the queen of England's birthday.²⁰

The ceremony was quite elaborate and cost the settlement of Belize over ten percent of its annual budget. After cards of invitation were sent to all the merchants, inviting them to the coronation of the new king of Mosquitia, on the appointed morning, the dignitaries and townspeople gathered for a parade, then set out for the church. George Frederick, in the uniform of a British major, rode horseback between two attendant British officers and his chiefs followed in double

file, dressed in sailor's trousers. At the church, the service was read by the chaplain of Belize in the name of the Archbishop of Canterbury, amid the roar of cannon salutes by vessels in the harbor. The regalia given to George Frederick included a silver-gilt crown, a sword, and a scepter. A dinner and a late night of revelry followed the service. Pleased with their successes, the British and the Miskito looked forward to continued good relations and a long period of prosperity.²¹

The young king, only twenty years old, was a bright copper color and had long black curly hair hanging in ringlets down each side of his face, accentuating his dark expressive eyes and very white teeth. He had experienced trouble adjusting once again to the primitive life at the Cape after his years in Jamaica. In many respects, he felt like a stranger in his own land after having been absent for so long. George Frederick regretted both having left and having returned. He was ignorant of the needs of his people and of the traditional ceremonies and customs to be followed. Moreover, he felt helpless to remedy problems, such as the way in which some Jamaican traders took advantage of his subjects, even flogging them for failures to pay small debts.²²

George Frederick also suffered from the divisive tactics of his father. General Robinson and Governor Clementi continued to rule their domains with little or no deference to the new king. Each of the major settlements on the Coast,

however, did have a house set aside for the use of the king or the officers acting on his behalf. During royal visits, the laws and regulations formulated by the local headmen would be presented for the sanction of the king. The Belize magistrates sent George Frederick presents for him to distribute among the other chiefs as a means of bolstering his limited authority. Confused and frustrated by the demands of his position, the new king sought an escape in womanizing and heavy drinking, leaving administrative matters in the hands of his assistants.²³

While in an inebriated state, the young king was susceptible to "every visionary scheme submitted to him by the traders."²⁴ One of these visionaries was the colorful soldier of fortune, General Sir Gregor McGregor, who had fought as a mercenary with Simon Bolivar in the South American Wars of Independence. McGregor fled from the Spaniards in 1820 and landed at Cape Gracias a Dios, where he resided for a time with King George Frederick. While there he obtained a grant from the king to a huge tract of land south of Black River in exchange for a large quantity of rum. The area was the same Poya territory which had been granted earlier to Black River speculators during George I's reign. Without funds but with the title in his pocket, McGregor set out for England, where he interested a group of merchants in forming a colonization company. Although a settlement of colonists was one objective, the directors of the company admitted that their main purpose was "the supplying of

British dry goods to the revolted [Central American] provinces."²⁵

The "information" provided by McGregor for the purpose of recruiting colonists for his proposed settlement was clearly fraudulent and bordered on the ridiculous. It aimed at exploiting the hopes of the unaware English, Scots, and Irish. Calling himself "His Serene Highness Gregor, Prince of Poyais, Cacique of the Poyer Nation, Defender of the Indians," McGregor extolled the healthy climate, the rich soil, the abundant crops, woods, horses and cattle, and the many gold mines, the variety of marine resources, and the harbors unrivaled for shipping.²⁶ All of this sounded very attractive to potential colonists, and more than a few were willing to make down payments on unseen land in order to migrate to this New World paradise.

The expectations of the more than 200 colonists who arrived during the late winter and spring of 1823 suffered cruel reverses from the beginning. At the mouth of the Black River, where the first contingent of colonists landed, there were no houses or church awaiting them as had been promised - only unbroken forest to the water's edge. The land had to be cleared immediately to make a place to pitch tents. Thus began many weeks of misery. Disappointment was so intense that the colonists did little to make life as bearable as it might have been. The ill-fated nature of the undertaking was foreshadowed very early by the flight, without notice, of the ship that had brought them. It sailed away with a large part

of their dry and unspoiled provisions - arms, spirits, merchandise, and medicines.²⁷

In the absence of adequate housing and sanitation, and without proper food and water, disease took its toll. In addition, the colonists were victimized by General Robinson, the Indian leader of the region. He did not recognize the land grant and demanded a payment from the colonists. The "Poyais" currency offered by the settlers was considered bogus and unacceptable to Robinson. They possessed no other money to meet these payments or to purchase food from the Indians. As illness set in almost immediately, little farming, hunting, or gathering ever took place. For a while, the settlers managed to augment their meagre food supplies by trading rum and gunpowder with the Indians, but eventually these supplies ran out. Another group of settlers arrived but their ship brought no new provisions; only the surplus stores needed for the voyage. James Douglas, the colony's surgeon, recounted the daily tragedies:

April 25 - Of 200 individuals all were sick, with the exception of nine. One family of seven persons - father, mother, and five sons - were all ill: they lay on the ground on cane leaves.

April 26 - Today, three of the men, while crossing the lagoon in front of my house, in a pitpan, upset. One of the party, a good swimmer, struck out for the shore: he had only proceeded a few yards when he shrieked out and suddenly sank. He had evidently been seized by one of the alligators, which are numerous in the lagoons. Alligator was shot the next day.²⁸

Toward the end of their ordeal, King George Frederick came to visit and gave temporary assistance to the suffering

colonists. He made his people hunt and fish to supply them. With great enjoyment, he showed the colonists the few remains of the former Spanish settlement in the area. This convinced them that a large settlement had indeed existed here, as depicted by Thomas Strangeways in his Sketch of the Mosquito Shore - one of the effective sources of company propaganda.²⁹ But it did not alter the fact that they had come to a place that was now completely desolate.

To make matters worse, King George Frederick soon became angry with the colonists because they would not swear allegiance to him. According to George Frederick, the McGregor land grant was null and void because he had never given such a grant to McGregor. Whether George Frederick actually granted the land while in a drunken stupor, or whether the unscrupulous McGregor fabricated the grant himself, is unclear. In any case, the king was less concerned about the actual land than he was about losing more of his political authority. McGregor's assumed title of cacique was the main irritant to the king. The settlers misunderstood the issue and felt that George Frederick was trying to make them give up their English citizenship and their allegiance to the British monarch. After only one week, George Frederick and his Indian attendants abandoned the settlers to their fate.³⁰

With the Indians gone, the colonists' isolation was complete. For the colonization company, it was a clear case of desertion, of leaving the colonists to their fate, with

none of the promises fulfilled and no succor from England. Fortunately, George Frederick notified the authorities in Belize about the condition of the settlers, and ships were sent to pick them up. Even so, for many it was too late, and they were buried among the earlier and more successful settlers who had lived out their lives on the Coast in the previous century. Of the over three hundred settlers sent to the Black River colony, over two hundred perished, and only forty-five managed to find their way back to the British Isles. The disaster was complete.³¹

It is interesting to contrast this experience with the two generations of British settlers who had made Black River their home in the eighteenth century and made it productive and self-supporting. However, that colony had been established in healthier country, many miles upriver, where the soils were fertile. Being forced by circumstances to remain at the coastal lagoon was unfortunate for the McGregor colonists, for, as the Spanish settlers had discovered before them, this site was disease ridden and unproductive.³² But initial responsibility for the wretched project fell upon Gregor McGregor. While the colonists suffered, he remained in England, living well off the proceeds of the invalid land sales, distributing "titles of nobility" in his "Poyais Kingdom," and printing propaganda tracts. Eventually, he served a brief prison term because of a technicality in his methods of raising money for the project. For many years, reports written by the survivors of the scheme dampened any

chance of reviving a colonization effort on the Mosquito Coast.³³

Meanwhile, with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain actively pursued peace efforts - both in Europe as well as the Western Hemisphere. As an industrial nation, it was in British interest to establish peace in order to promote prosperity and to gain free access to sources and markets. British leaders feared that one, or more, European powers would attempt to force the newly independent Latin American countries back under Spanish control. The Foreign Secretary, George Canning, turned to the United States and proposed a joint Anglo-American declaration against intervention in Latin America by any European power. Suspicious of Britain's intentions in the area and jealously guarding its own prerogatives, the United States government rejected the proposal. Instead, the U.S. unilateral proclaimed the Monroe Doctrine in December of 1823. The document stated that the American continents would not henceforth be considered subject to future colonization by any European power, including Britain. Although the U.S. lacked the necessary power to fulfill the Monroe Doctrine effectively, the document did affect Britain's influence on the Mosquito Coast and Central America.

British entrepreneurs continued to expand commercial investments in Central America during the 1830's. By 1834, in British eyes, the commercial importance of Central America had become so great that a very active and controversial

consul, Frederick Chatfield, was dispatched to negotiate a commercial treaty with the newly formed Central American Federation. For eighteen years Chatfield proved that his intentions went well beyond a trade agreement. His true purpose proved to be the promotion of general British interests, whatever they might be and whatever the political situation.

It was during the reign of Robert Charles Frederic (1824-1842) that the English again exerted more influence on the Mosquito Coast. The direction of this influence once more came from Belize. Like his older brother, George Frederick, Robert Charles Frederick was crowned at Belize. The Belize government spent 1,000 pounds on entertainment and presents.³⁴ However, in spite of pressure from the Belizeans, the British government refused to make the Coast an English colony. Effective settlement was seen as necessary to reinforce what lately had become a very marginal British presence on the Mosquito Coast. Proponents of revived colonization resorted to all kinds of exaggerated propaganda - much like what was written during McGregor's earlier attempts.

Such propaganda was apparently effective, and in 1839, British colonists made another effort to populate Black River. Many of the problems which beset the "Poyais" settlers also beleaguered the new colonists in their settlement, Fort Wellington. Disease, delays, mismanagement, and inexperience all played a role in the settlement's

downfall. According to Thomas Young, an official of the colonization company and himself a colonist, "... instead of Fort Wellington being a settlement, and a hostelry for new comers, it was completely disorganized, and with barely the necessaries of life."³⁵

Despite the chronic failures of colonization (if it can be called that), the Mosquito Coast again played a prominent role in Britain's Central American policies, and British occupancy became more pronounced than it had been since the evacuation of 1787. By 1836 the banks of the principal rivers within Belize were almost completely cleared of mahogany. Yet the next ten years were a boom era for mahogany as the demand for this wood rapidly expanded in England resulting from railway construction and the growing popularity of this fine wood with English cabinet makers. The British in Belize began to look to the untouched mahogany stands of the Mosquito Coast. Both Francisco Morazan, President of the Central American Federation, and Robert Charles Frederic began awarding grants - often for the same tracts of land. The most desired tracts were along the Roman River east of Trujillo.³⁶

Robert Charles Frederic attempted to restore the position of Miskito king to its former importance. In 1832, he outlawed wife and daughter beating under the death penalty, he forbade the capture of Indians for use as slaves, and he imposed an annual tax of one dollar on every free male subject above the age of fourteen. In addition, Robert

Charles Frederic endeavored to extend the borders of the Miskito Kingdom south from Bluefields all the way to Boca del Toro in what is now Panama. This was a traditional area of Miskito slave-raiding and turtle fishing, but the territory was also claimed by Colombia. On October 26, 1832, he appointed one of his loyal Indians as "captain and magistrate of the Terribee and Valiente Indians, and collector of taxes from Manchioneal Bay, Monkey Point, Bocas del Toro, and other places adjacent."³⁷

At the beginning of January 1837, Colonel Alexander Macdonald became superintendent of Belize and almost immediately he began to exert his personal influence over the Mosquito Coast. Macdonald sent archival material to England to demonstrate the long-term links between the Miskito and the British. He encouraged King Robert Charles Frederic to request the protection of Great Britain against possible Central American aggression, and on January 25, 1837, the Miskito king wrote to the king of England.³⁸

In 1839 Robert Charles Frederic wrote to the comptroller of the port of Moin, Costa Rica, notifying him that the port had no right to collect duties. This claim was apparently based on Macdonald's perception that the cacao seized in raids on Costa Rican plantations during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was in fact annual tribute paid to the Miskito. Naturally, the Costa Ricans ignored this dubious claim.³⁹ By February 1840, Macdonald had convinced Robert Charles Frederic to appoint a special commission to

govern his domains. Macdonald was appointed the king's chief advisor, and despite the disapproval of Britain's Colonial Office, other Belizean officials made up the rest of the commission.⁴⁰

On January 5, 1841, Macdonald wrote to the Costa Ricans informing them that Salt Creek and the port of Moin were within the territory of the Miskito, "an ally of the British nation," and that any attempt by the Costa Ricans to take possession of these ports "will not be permitted by the British Government."⁴¹ Macdonald's next move was to organize an expedition to re-establish a British protectorate on the Mosquito Coast. He left Belize on July 20, 1841, on the British war-ship HMS Tweed, picked the king up at Gracias a Dios, and then sailed to Bluefields. At Bluefields Macdonald persuaded the king to sign a new document that established the same advisory commission that the Colonial Office had disallowed. This time the composition was not conditional upon the approval of the British government. Macdonald also convinced the king to change the successor to the throne from his eldest son, George, to his youngest son, Clarence, with the second advisory commission serving as regent until the boy was old enough to rule. By choosing the youngest son as successor, Macdonald and the others on the advisory commission hoped to control the politics of the Miskito Kingdom for a longer period of time. The English no longer allowed the kingdom to develop autonomously.⁴²

While in Bluefields, the king freed the slaves. The

owners were to be compensated by revenues from the port of San Juan, once it was taken from the Nicaraguans. On August 12, 1841, the Tweed entered the port of San Juan, captured the Nicaraguan commandant, Manuel Quijano, raised the Miskito flag, and claimed the port for the Miskito king. Later, they sailed south to Bocas del Toro and armed whatever Indians would acknowledge allegiance to the Miskito king. They then visited Greater Corn Island to demonstrate the Miskito claim over it and finally returned to Cape Gracias a Dios, where King Frederic disembarked.⁴³

Frederic eventually died in 1842. The consumption of large quantities of liquor throughout his life was a main contributor to his death. The American consul for Central America, Ephraim G. Squier, wrote that Frederic had been captured by the British and taken to Belize as a prisoner.⁴⁴ It was Squier's goal to discredit British activities in Central America and his account of the events is consistent with the picture he continually promoted of the Miskito kings as British pawns. Unfortunately, Squier's account of Frederic's "capture" and "imprisonment" was accepted as true by later writers. While much of what Squier described was biased and inaccurate, there was some truth to his description of Robert Charles Frederic. The stereotype of the Miskito kings as drunks who signed away vast stretches of land to private individuals while intoxicated, and were puppets of the British, seems to have been based mainly on the unfortunate figures of George Frederic and his younger

brother, Robert Charles Frederic.

Superintendent Macdonald managed to serve as regent for only one year after King Frederic's death. His plan to have Prince William Clarence, the younger son of Robert Charles Frederic, installed on the throne did not work out as he hoped. In 1842, Macdonald decided to send Clarence to England to be educated in order to enhance his regal prospects. His plans were thwarted in May of 1843 when the British colonial secretary wrote to the Miskito headmen on the Coast that the regency would be placed in their hands. Furthermore, one month later, Macdonald was replaced as superintendent of Belize by Charles Fancourt.⁴⁵

In September 1843, the governor of Jamaica wrote to Fancourt expressing the opinion that Her Majesty's government should not interfere with the free choice of the Miskito people in selecting a king from among the family members of Robert Charles Frederic. In 1844 Fancourt wrote back to England that it appeared that Prince George Augustus Frederic would become the next king, rather than William Clarence suggesting that the British had little control over the actual succession. Indeed, in 1845, George was chosen heir and crowned in Belize.⁴⁶ The Miskito tradition of primogeniture continued despite an overt attempt by Macdonald to upset the custom.

In early 1844, Macdonald, now living in London, was instrumental in having Patrick Walker, who had served as his secretary in Belize, appointed to the post of "British

resident on the Mosquito Shore," a position that was to be comparable to that of the superintendents during the last half of the eighteenth century.⁴⁷ By this time British interests in the Coast were beginning to shift from the logging potentials of the Honduran coast to the interoceanic potential of the San Juan River and the importance of the port of San Juan. As a result, Walker moved himself and the king's residence to Bluefields to be closer to the port of San Juan. Although George Augustus Frederic was crowned in 1845, he was still a minor and continued to receive advice from Walker, who by 1848 was calling himself regent of the Miskito king, as well as consul general of Her Britannic Majesty on the Mosquito Coast.⁴⁸

Although King George Augustus was Macdonald's second choice because of Macdonald's desire to prolong the regency, it is apparent that the young king was not the fool he was made out to be. George Augustus received a more than adequate education in Jamaica and an observer there was nonplussed with George's perfect English: "He said that he felt more like an Englishman than anything else, and in fact considered English his proper language, for he certainly could not speak Mosquitian so well."⁴⁹ In his room at the Cape, George Augustus possessed a large library of English authors, including Shakespeare, Byron, and Sir Walter Scott. Another Englishman, John Collinson, explored the area controlled by the Miskito and presented much the same favorable picture of him:

The last king, my companion for some time, while exploring the country, was a good specimen of what an enlightened Indian can become. His education, received at Jamaica, was quite equal to that of an ordinary English gentleman. With it he had acquired a refined taste, ... he was never without one or two volumes of our best English poets in his pocket, and availed himself of every unoccupied moment to peruse them.⁵⁰

The American writers, influenced by Squier, described the king in derogatory terms. For example, in an anonymous pamphlet written in 1849, the Miskito king was described as "a little child who scarcely knows his right hand from his left."⁵¹ Unfortunately, this tradition continues up to the present. In his 1989 book, Penny Ante Imperialism, Robert Naylor wrote that "he was of below-average intelligence" and that "he lacked a broad exposure to British Caribbean culture."⁵² A reassessment of the Miskito kings is definitely in order.

The British were plagued throughout the 1840's by their claim of sovereignty over Belize and the Bay Islands, and their support of Miskito independence on the Coast. British authorities were reminded constantly that other nations had interests in those areas. The situation seemed to demand a delicate touch. But this was the era when British foreign policy was dominated by Lord Palmerston. Foreign Secretary Palmerston was a strong-willed, and assertive individual who considered himself a natural champion of British prestige and honor. His position on Britain's status in the Bay of Honduras was that, "Honduras is ours by the best of all titles, that of the sword."⁵³ What he failed to note,

however, was the importance of Miskito swords in that possession. Britain was in a position to bargain only because of her close affiliation with the Miskito Indians. Without them, Britain's standing in the area would be significantly reduced.

Palmerston's representatives on the scene, Chatfield, Macdonald, and Walker, followed his policy with vigor, and often to excess. In Nicaragua, movements toward unification during the 1840's were overshadowed by the regional feud between the cities of Leon and Granada, and the continual strife between Liberals and Conservatives. In these conditions of virtual anarchy, it is little wonder that Nicaragua was easy prey to British advances. Chatfield, in his attempt to counter Nicaraguan protests regarding the Mosquito Coast in 1841, supported Macdonald's temporary occupation of San Juan del Norte, and in 1843 ordered the blockade of Nicaragua's Atlantic ports. In 1844, Nicaragua again failed to come to terms - British terms - and so Chatfield endorsed a second blockade.⁵⁴

On June 30, 1847, the Foreign Office of Great Britain announced officially that the boundaries of the Miskito nation extended from Cape Honduras to San Juan del Norte. A British warship arrived at San Juan del Norte on October 25, 1847, and informed the Nicaraguans that Miskito forces would occupy San Juan on January 1, 1848. A few weeks later, the Nicaraguans sent a mission to the Mosquito Coast to encourage Princess Agnes Ana Frederic, the king's eldest sister, to

state her disapproval of the proposed Miskito takeover of San Juan. This she did, and she recognized Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Mosquito Coast.⁵⁵

The king's sister apparently had little influence over the Miskito King or the British. On January 1, 1848, Patrick Walker and King George Augustus Frederic, under the protection of a British warship, sailed into the port of San Juan and took possession of it in the name of the Miskito king. The name of the port was changed to Greytown in honor of the Jamaican governor. The Nicaraguan authorities were able to put up little resistance, and were driven to an upriver fort. One week later - word of San Juan del Norte's capture having reached Granada - a Nicaraguan army force retook the town and removed the acting Miskito governor, George Hodgson.

The Nicaraguan reoccupation was brief. They were driven out a second time (in February) by a sizeable force dispatched from Jamaica, and this action proved decisive. For the first time since 1780, a British expeditionary force ascended the San Juan River. First, it attacked the fort at the confluence of the Sarapiquí River, causing the Nicaraguans to flee upriver. The British then destroyed the fort and proceeded up the San Juan to capture Fort San Carlos on the lake. In early March, the Nicaraguans capitulated and signed a treaty accepting de facto British occupation of San Juan del Norte and relinquishing their customs collections at the port. Nicaragua made it clear, however, that despite

British or Miskito occupation, it did not consider its sovereign right to the Mosquito Shore in any way renounced.⁵⁶ It is worth noting that unlike earlier excursions up the San Juan River, no Miskito forces were involved in this later adventure. Miskito support for this undertaking was at a minimum. The revenue collected at the port would not benefit the average Miskito Indian. The king, however, had much to gain. The British played on George Augustus Frederic's greed and thus secured the possession of the eastern terminus for the proposed interoceanic canal.

Up to this time the United States showed little interest in Central America and growing British influence there following independence. American commercial interest in the area increased steadily, but it was secondary compared to investments elsewhere. There had been no stable diplomatic representation in the region, and most of the time Frederick Chatfield, because of his assiduous promotion of British interests, enjoyed free rein and little competition. Elijah Hise, one of the earliest American representatives in Central America, remarked that he found himself "in a country whose ignorant and savage inhabitants do not respect or understand the rights of diplomatic agents from other countries."⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that he was referring to the Central Americans and not the Miskito.

But in 1848, gold was discovered in California, developing the desire and need for a canal to facilitate the transport of thousands of settlers and prospectors to the

newly acquired territories. The Americans recognized the port of San Juan del Norte as the key to controlling any such canal, and United States policy supported Nicaragua and refused to acknowledge the Miskito Kingdom and its claim to the canal site. The Nicaraguan government appealed to the Americans to intervene on their behalf. In London, Lord Palmerston learned of this action and replied that "it was a matter of total indifference to her majesty's government what the American government might say or do."⁵⁸

The Americans did not respond to Nicaragua's plea because they realized that their position in Central America was not yet strong enough to challenge that of Great Britain. In 1849 they attempted to remedy the situation by sending Ephraim Squire to the area with the mission to counter and thwart British and Miskito claims. The battles between Squire and Chatfield are legendary. In their haste to establish hegemony, both exceeded the instructions of their home governments. Their pugnacious efforts almost led to war between the two powers, but cooler heads prevailed and promoted discussions between the two competing powers. In a much more conciliatory mood, Lord Palmerston wrote to his American counterpart:

On the question of the rights of the Mosquito Nation as connected with the project for making a communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans ... the British Government has no selfish or exclusive view in that regard.⁵⁹

Talks were convened in 1850 and resulted in the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. This treaty provided for joint control and

building of any canal proposed for the isthmus. However, the peace provided by this treaty was short lived. Tension between the two powers escalated once again as a result of the "Prometheus Incident," Britain's seizure of the Bay Islands, the 1854 bombardment of San Juan del Norte by the Americans, and the infamous filibustering activities of William Walker.⁶⁰

Most British statesmen realized that future American dominance of the Coast was inevitable. The U.S. had acquired the necessary means to back up the Monroe Doctrine. Squire was determined to make San Juan del Norte a centre of U.S. investment, and in 1853, he wrote an article in Harper's Monthly Magazine promoting the favorable aspects of the port. He also used the opportunity to chastize Britain's "control" of the Miskito Indians.⁶¹ By the late 1850's, American economic investments in the region overtook those of Great Britain. In addition, Britain's presence in San Juan del Norte did not produce the anticipated benefits. The Nicaraguan government cut off all commercial contacts with the interior. The town was in a precarious position: it was forced to rely solely upon provisions brought by ship from abroad. Also, the mahogany cutters north of Bluefields complained that the Miskito Indians no longer provided the necessary labor for their enterprises and that their loggers occasionally suffered plunder and violence at the hands of rebel Indians. It was hoped that George Augustus Frederick would intervene on the cutter's behalf, but he failed to do

so. Furthermore, because of scarce personnel and transport, British surveillance and control of outlying parts of the Coast was not a simple matter.

British leaders realized the precariousness of their position and began to ponder how they could extricate themselves from the Coast without losing face. All the while, the United States continued to increase its diplomatic pressure on Britain to abandon its traditional protectorship over the Coast. The following passage from John Macy, the U.S. representative in Central America, demonstrates that the threats were often thinly veiled:

A protectorship so exercised, and in the name of such persons as the Mosquito Indians, would, it is plain, amount to practical sovereignty [for Britain] ... and the United States might be impelled, for controlling reasons, to undertake a counter Protectorship of Indians, or other persons in Central America.⁶²

Britain's longstanding and determined proclamation of Miskito sovereignty, notwithstanding the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, plagued British statesmen in their dealings with the United States. Having used the Miskito claim to eastern Nicaragua and Honduras, and even San Juan del Norte, as the basis for its occupation and protectorate, Britain found itself with a commitment to the Miskito people and their leaders from which it could not easily withdraw. But the British did withdraw. And as a result, they abandoned the Miskito to American, Nicaraguan, and Honduran schemes.

In 1859, at the prompting of the United States, Britain signed a treaty with Honduras which returned the Bay Islands

to Honduran control and acknowledged Honduran sovereignty over the entire area north and west of the Coco River - in other words, almost half of the Miskito Kingdom. The British leaders assuaged their collective conscience by including in Article III of the treaty a stipulation that the Honduran government was to provide the Miskito with an annual payment, "in gold or silver," of five thousand dollars. Careful to guard their own interests, Article IV guaranteed that British land grants previously established with the Miskito would be honored by the Honduran government.⁶³

The British abandonment of the rest of the Mosquito Coast took another year to negotiate. The important port of San Juan del Norte clearly played a larger role in these negotiations than did considerations for the Miskito Indians. In 1860, Nicaragua and Britain came to terms and signed the Treaty of Managua. San Juan del Norte was to be turned over to the Nicaraguan government but it was to remain a free port. The British terminated their protectorate over the Coast and demoted the Miskito king to the rank of tribal chief. As a concession to the Miskito, the Nicaraguan government assented to the native right to self-government, but it was made clear that this privilege was not to be "inconsistent with the sovereign rights of Nicaragua."⁶⁴ Further provisions included the right of Britain to intervene on Miskito behalf if it should become necessary. Also, an annual stipend of five thousand dollars was to be paid by the Nicaraguan government to the Miskito.

The Miskito people were never consulted in the process of forming these treaties. If they had been, they never would have agreed to them. Neither the Nicaraguan or Honduran governments, nor the Spanish before them, had occupied or demonstrated effective control of the Mosquito Coast. The land had been settled and continuously peopled by the Miskito. Their claim to the Coast pre-dated any European or Spanish-American counterclaims. Besides giving up their absolute sovereignty, the treaties also reduced by more than one-half, the amount of land to which they were entitled. The treaties also excluded nearly all the traditional centres of Miskito population in the northern reaches of the Mosquito Coast, including the vitally important transportation route, the Coco River. In response, the Miskito emulated many entrepreneurs who found themselves excluded from a spurious transaction involving their property - they ignored it. But the Miskito's mistake of disregarding the dubious claim would make itself apparent in the following years. Over the next thirty-five years the native peoples would struggle to keep their traditional homeland out of the rapacious grasp of foreign speculation. Like many other indigenous nations around the planet, the Miskito commenced an ill-fated struggle.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹ Helms, Asang, p. 87.

² These allegations were reported by a later resident of the Coast, Thomas Strangeways. Strangeways himself was involved in a colonizing scheme and wished to downplay the harsh conditions of the Coast. See Thomas Strangeways, Sketch of the Mosquito Shore, (Edinburgh: W. Reid, 1822), p. 37.

³ "Captain General to Crown, July 12, 1787," AGCA, A1.17, leg. 335, exp. 714.

⁴ Hodgson's actions may have benefitted the British during this period but it cannot be forgotten that his motives may have been entirely personal. By keeping the Spanish out of the area, Hodgson was able to secure Bluefields as a duty free port, and was thus able to continue lining his pockets from trade.

⁵ Floyd, p. 177.

⁶ Orlando Roberts travelled and traded extensively on the Coast in the 1820's and later wrote a book about his experience's. See Orlando Roberts, Narrative of Voyages and Excursions on the East Coast and in the Interior of Central America, (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1965, copy of original 1827 edition), p. 141.

⁷ Don Carlos' son did not reach Spain. Miskito Indians hostile to Don Carlos stopped the ship and ordered the son back to the Coast. "Royal Order, August 29, 1788," AGCA,

A1.17, leg. 2451, exp. 18897.

⁸ Cited in Floyd, p. 175.

⁹ "Bishop to Crown, Leon, February 20, 1789," AGCA,
A1.17, leg. 576, exp. 3792.

¹⁰ Roberts, p. 137.

¹¹ "Don Carlos to bishop, Tuapi, Sept. 25, 1789," BAGG,
VI, p. 182.

¹² Roberts, p. 273.

¹³ Archives of British Honduras, I, p. 280.

¹⁴ Archives of British Honduras, II, p. 84.

¹⁵ Archives of British Honduras, II, p. 65.

¹⁶ Floyd erroneously reports that King George II died in the attack on Black River. But according to Roberts and a Captain George Henderson who later visited the Coast, George died after the raid and may have been killed by his brother Stephen who used the opportunity of the riots to assassinate his brother thereby gaining the crown for himself. See Olien, pp. 213-214 and Roberts, p. 146.

¹⁷ It was estimated that General Robinson had at his disposal 1500-2000 warriors. See Roberts, p. 111.

¹⁸ Naylor, p. 71.

¹⁹ The political situation on the Coast is described by Charles Napier Bell, a visitor to the region in the 1840's. His book demonstrates a classic example of the paternalistic attitude many British visitors to the Coast held towards the Miskito. See Charles Napier Bell, Tangweera: Life and Adventures among Gentle Savages, (London: Edward Arnold,

1899), p. 53.

²⁰ "Annual Report on the State of the Colonies - 1817," British Parliamentary Papers - Colonies General, Honduras, (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1970), IX, p. 39.

²¹ Although he did not witness them himself, the details of the coronation ceremony are provided by Orlando Roberts. See Roberts, p. 147.

²² Roberts, p. 148.

²³ Roberts spent considerable time with the young king and leaves a good account of his personal difficulties. See Roberts, pp. 147-150.

²⁴ Roberts, p. 131.

²⁵ This information is provided by the colony's young surgeon who managed to survive the ill-fated scheme and later moved to Quebec. His experience's are related in: James Douglas, "Account of the Attempt to Form a Settlement on the Mosquito Shore in 1823," Transactions of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, Session of 1869, (Montreal: 1869), p. 30.

²⁶ An unsympathetic account of McGregor's venture is provided by Alfred Hasbrouck, "Gregor McGregor and the Colonization of Poyais, Between 1820 and 1824," Hispanic American Historical Review, 7, (1927), pp. 438-59.

²⁷ Douglas, p. 27.

²⁸ Douglas, pp. 32-33.

²⁹ Strangeways' book was a thinly disguised piece of propaganda and contained many outrageous claims,

exaggerations, and outright lies. One cynical reviewer of the book wrote that Strangeways portrayed the Coast as a paradise "where all manner of grain grows without sowing, and the most delicious fruits without planting, where cows and horses support themselves, and where... roasted pigs run about with forks in their backs, crying, 'come, come eat me!'" Cited in Olien, p. 219. See also Thomas Strangeways, Sketch of the Mosquito Shore, Including the Territory of Poyais ..., p. 29.

³⁰ Olien, p. 219.

³¹ Victor Allen, "The Prince of Poyais," History Today, (1952), II, p. 59.

³² For an account of the Spanish attempt to colonize Black River see: William J. Griffith, Empires in the Wilderness, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 19-21.

³³ Naylor, p. 81.

³⁴ Archives of British Honduras, III, p. 27.

³⁵ Thomas Young, Narrative of a Residence on the Mosquito Shore, (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1842), p. 67.

³⁶ For a discussion of Britain's interest in mahogany, see Robert A. Naylor, "The Mahogany Trade as a Factor in the British Return to the Mosquito Shore in the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," Jamaican Historical Review, VII, (1967), pp. 40-67.

³⁷ Archives of British Honduras, III, p. 49.

38 Mario Rodriguez, A Palmerstonian Diplomat in Central America: Frederick Chatfield, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964), p. 128.

39 "King Robert Charles Frederic, October 17, 1839," AGCA, B1.4, leg. 210, exp. 448.

40 Archives of British Honduras, III, p. 112.

41 Archives of British Honduras, III, p. 149.

42 It appeared that King Frederic was not going to live much longer. Macdonald argued that the younger son was more intelligent than his older brother and was therefore more suited to the throne. In reality, he only wanted to extend the period of his potential regency.

43 It was necessary to demonstrate sovereignty over the Corn Islands because Colombia also claimed the islands. R. A. Humphries, The Diplomatic History of British Honduras, 1638-1901, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 49.

44 Samuel A. Bard (pseudonym of E. G. Squire), Waikna; or Adventures on the Mosquito Shore, op. cited, p. 349.

45 Archives of British Honduras, III, p. 167.

46 Prince William Clarence died in England in 1848 at the age of fifteen. Archives of British Honduras, III, p. 175.

47 Rodriguez, p. 246.

48 "Central America, 1831-1850," Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860, ed. W. R. Manning, (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1933), III: p. 246.

49 B. Pim, Dottings on the Roadside, in Panama, Nicaragua, and Mosquito, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1869), p. 269.

50 J. Collinson, The Indians of the Mosquito Territory, memoirs read before the Anthropological Society of London, (London: published by the author, 1869), p. 56.

51 Cited in Olien, p. 227.

52 Naylor, Penny Ante Imperialism, op. cited, p. 159. Naylor's entire book tends to denigrate the Indians and downplay the importance of the Mosquito Coast. This, despite the fact that three major powers - Britain, France, and the U.S. - were extremely interested in acquiring the rights to build a canal through the Coast.

53 "Correspondence Respecting Central and South America, Sessions 1850-1896," British Paliamentary Papers - Area Studies, United States of America, (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971), XV, p. 94. Letter from Lord Palmerston to Lord Glenelg, dated March 9, 1839.

54 Chatfield used delinquent Nicaraguan loan payments as the excuse to blockade the ports. See Mark Van Aken, "British Policy Considerations in Central America Before 1850," Hispanic American Historical Review, 84, (February, 1962), pp. 56-57.

55 "Princess Agnes Ana Frederic, November 14, 1847," AGCA, B1.7, leg. 238, exp. 96.

56 "Colonel Salas to Granada, January 28, 1848," AGCA, B1.15, leg. 7, exp. 584.

57 "Hise to Buchanan, June 3, 1848," Foreign Relations of the United States: Guatemala, 1855, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1856), p. 209.

58 Cited in Craig L. Dozier, Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore, (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1985), p. 58.

59 "Correspondence Respecting Central and South America, Sessions 1850-1896," British Parliamentary Papers - Area Studies, United States of America, XV, p. 122. Letter from Lord Palmerston to Mr. Crampton, dated Nov. 9, 1849.

60 For a brief discussion of these events, see Dozier, pp. 87-102.

61 Ephraim George Squire, "San Juan de Nicaragua," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, X, (December, 1854), pp. 50-61.

62 "Correspondence Respecting Central and South America, Sessions 1850-1896," British Parliamentary Papers - Area Studies, United States of America, XV, p. 426. Letter from Mr. Macy to Mr. Dallas, May 24, 1856, (communicated to the Earl of Clarendon by Mr. Dallas, June 11, 1856).

63 Hertslet's Commercial Treaties, XI, p. 447.

64 Ibid, p. 448.

The Last Miskito Chief, Robert Henry Clarence



(Popular Science Monthly, vol. 45, no. 6, June 1894)

Chapter 5 - "Denouement and the Final Betrayal"

Article 1. Her Britannic Majesty ... will recognize as belonging to and under the sovereignty of the Republic of Nicaragua, the country hitherto occupied or claimed by the Mosquito Indians within the frontiers of the Republic, whatever that frontier may be.¹

The Treaty of Managua, 1860

In the 1860 Treaty of Managua Great Britain awarded to Nicaragua something it did not possess - sovereignty over the Miskito nation. Needless to say, the Miskito were disappointed with the British action. Without British support, the Indians were less able to fend off foreign incursions into their territory. The British had led the Miskito to believe that they would continue to defend indigenous rights to territorial autonomy, self-government, and self-determination. The Miskito had agreed to the establishment of a protectorate because they believed that the British respected them as allies and would act faithfully on their behalf. But the documents and letters written between members of the government revealed the true nature of British aims. Originally filed under the heading "Misquito Affairs," after 1856 these papers were placed under the subtitle "The Misquito Question."²

"The Question" was obviously whether or not British politicians saw it in their best interest to remain as advocates of Miskito independence. The answer was a resounding "no." The only interest to bolster was their own.

Charles Wyke, Chatfield's successor in Central America, wrote to his supervisor in London that he had successfully negotiated a treaty with Honduras:

... that State will be well satisfied to arrange the question amicably with Nicaragua for the sake of the great advantage she gains by restricting the Mosquito Indian within the limits named. The other modification consists in altering the date... from which the grant of lands made by the Mosquitos should not be disturbed, and this I made for the sake of protecting the interests of those British subjects who may still be holders of the so-called "Poyais Bonds."³

The British ambassador in Washington expressed his opinions even more vigorously:

...Greytown is now rather a source of embarrassment than of strength; the rest of the coast is perfectly useless. The climate is fatal to the European constitution; the natives are ...cross-bred savages of a revolting type.⁴

Despite the obvious change in British support, the situation for the Miskito was not immediately threatening because the Nicaraguans lacked the power to enforce their claim. A stalemate existed for almost thirty-five years and the Miskito society continued to function without much interference from the Nicaraguans. The main source of friction came from within. During George Augustus Frederic's rule the ethnic composition of the population began to change. A number of Jamaican blacks and mulattoes settled on the Coast near Bluefields as the Jamaican economy declined and as manumission freed the slave population. These newcomers sought to increase their political standing and soon exerted a powerful influence in Miskito affairs.

On September 12, 1861, a convention was held in Bluefields to establish a constitution for the operation of the newly established Miskito Reservation. From this point on in Miskito history, the positions of king, general, admiral, and governor ceased to exist. Altogether fifty-one headmen of the Miskito, black, and mulatto population attended the convention. Included in this group was an inordinately large delegation of nineteen individuals from Bluefields. There was only one headman from Cape Gracias a Dios and only three from Sandy Bay, the traditional seats of Miskito political power. In fact, only eleven of the fifty-one individuals present were designated as "Indian."⁵

The convention decided that George Augustus Frederic's title would be permanently changed from king to that of chief. A General Council and an Executive Council were formed composed primarily of former Jamaicans. They were to be influential in the affairs of the new government. The General Council of the Miskito also passed a series of acts concerning the organization of the government and authorized fifteen hundred dollars to be paid to the hereditary chief each year, in quarterly payments.⁶ It is difficult to understand George's acceptance of these terms, but perhaps following British abandonment, he felt that he must bolster his position - even if this meant courting the new arrivals from Jamaica and allowing them to pay him what amounted to a bribe.

In 1864 George Augustus Frederic died and the chiefdom

passed to his nephew William Henry Clarence. Since the new chief was only ten years old, Henry Patterson, the black vice-president of the council, acted on his behalf until he came of age. The Nicaraguans saw the passing of authority to a ten-year-old as a sign of weakness in Miskito leadership and offered money to leading members of the council so that they might use their influence to bring about the annexation of the reservation to Nicaragua. Their plan found no takers. The Nicaraguan government promptly refused to acknowledge the new chief and declined to pay to the chief the subsidy that had been agreed upon in the 1860 treaty.⁷

According to the Treaty of Managua, Nicaragua was to pay the Miskito five thousand dollars each year for the first ten years following the signing of the treaty. It did not. The Nicaraguans may have had real concerns about the non-Miskito influence in the government of the new chief, but this does not explain why they never attempted to make the payment earlier. As friction between the Miskito and Nicaraguans intensified in 1877, the Indians finally protested. It seemed that the authorities of the Mosquito Reservation could still look to Britain for moral support. In 1878 the British and Nicaraguans agreed that the dispute over the 1860 treaty be referred to Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria for arbitration.

His decision, highly unfavorable to Nicaragua, proved to be a turning point, economically and politically, for the Mosquito Coast. It encouraged increased British and foreign

influence in the reservation by restoring almost complete autonomy to the Miskito authorities and by strictly limiting Nicaragua's sovereignty rights. Not only did it call for continuation of the annuity but also for settlement of all the unpaid installments of previous years, with interest. More significantly, it provided that the government of Nicaragua not be entitled to grant concessions for the acquisition of natural resources within the reservation; and that this right be reserved to the Miskito authorities alone.⁸ Embittered by the decision, the Nicaraguans determined to resist the terms of the arbitration. In this they were to have the support of the American government.

Ironically, most American investors and settlers in the region supported the Emperor's decision. They understood that taxes and expenses would increase if the Nicaraguans annexed the land. In the 1860's a small rubber boom occurred as U.S. investors discovered that the indigenous india rubber trees produced a viable product. The trade in rubber continued for many years, then diminished as the Brazilian rubber boom intensified, but these early rubber merchants made small fortunes. Most of the rubber came from Costa Rica but was shipped out of the free port of Greytown (San Juan del Norte). But because of British pressure Greytown remained a free port and Nicaragua was unable to collect an export tax.⁹

The emperor's arbitration decision gave the assurance that American banana interests (planters, shippers,

and merchants) felt that they needed to invest in the Miskito Reservation. A major economic inducement was the suitability of the alluvial flats of the Escondido River (Bluefields River) between Bluefields and Rama for banana plantations at a time when this fruit was becoming popular in the United States. Like the British before them, Americans were free to acquire concessions at low cost and to operate without economic restraints. The Miskito government actively solicited these interests. Colonists arrived from New Orleans in increasing numbers, bought tracts along the river, and farmed banana plantations. Accompanying them were merchants who settled in Bluefields. In addition to banana cultivation, in 1884 the large American wood products company, the John D. Emery Company of Boston, established itself in the reservation to cut mahogany.

Bluefields received a new lease on life with the banana business. In the words of the American geographer James Parsons, it became for a time "one of the major outposts of Yankee 'Manifest Destiny' in the Caribbean."¹⁰ The Mosquito Fruit Company was formed with tracts obtained (at very low prices) along both sides of the Escondido River, each with a 3-mile river frontage. Among the shipping companies was that of Jacob Weinberger, who established the Bluefields Steamship Company in 1890 and soon became dominant in both transport and production. By 1891, banana exports totalled about \$231,000. By 1893 Bluefields shipped more bananas than any two other ports in the world combined.¹¹ In that same year,

the trade of the Miskito Coast with the United States amounted to almost \$4,000,000.¹²

To the outside observer it would appear that the Miskito simply swapped British for American interests. But in fact, the prosperity that resulted from the cultivation of bananas soon spread throughout the Miskito economy. The administration of the Miskito chiefs encouraged native small-holders to clear and cultivate land. Visitors reported that the greatest problem the Coast faced was a labor shortage - locals who did not work or share in their own holdings could earn enough to satisfy their needs in two or three hours of clearing work a day.¹³ In addition, gold mining became a major economic activity along the banks of the more northerly rivers located in the Miskito Reservation. In 1891, gold exports totalled over \$85,000.¹⁴

The life of Miskito chief, William Henry Clarence, was cut short at about the age of twenty-three. In May 1879, he was the victim of a revolutionary plot and died of poisoning. The next two chiefs followed in rapid succession and in 1891, Robert Henry Clarence (destined to be the last Miskito Chief), assumed the position of leadership. Robert Keely, a visitor to the Coast, wrote that Robert Henry Clarence "... is a full-blooded Indian, is a handsome, intelligent, and well-educated young man of twenty or thereabouts."¹⁵ The government, under Robert Henry Clarence, followed the same basic organization that had been established in 1861. The representation of the General Council was increased to 91

headmen, and this time, more Indian villages and towns participated. However, the black and mulatto influence, as well as a certain level of corruption, remained. A startling example of this was the inclusion in the General Miskito Council of a headman from New Orleans.¹⁶ It is probable that this individual was merely a representative of one of the banana companies and not an expatriated Miskito Indian.

The heavy capital investment by Americans, and to a lesser extent, by the British, led to an incredibly rapid growth. The estimated North American investment in the reservation in 1893 was \$10,000,000. Not only were Americans involved in the banana, mining, and gold industries, they introduced steamers and tugs on the Escondido River, and they owned many large and valuable buildings and warehouses. The population of the reservation in 1894 was estimated to have reached 15,000, with the Miskito representing 8,000 of this number.¹⁷

In 1893, a change in government in Nicaragua signaled a less comfortable life for the Miskito and the Americans living in the reservation. Before the enormous increment in productivity in the Reserve, the Nicaraguan government had been mainly concerned about its national prestige in the Miskito question. But by the time the young Liberal leader, Jose Santos Zelaya, came to power there was a new element: the Reserve had become a great economic asset. There was now a substantial difference between the prosperous banana-growing, mahogany-cutting, gold-mining economy, with its

associated shipping and mercantile interests, and much less developed Nicaragua. Nicaraguans became jealous of the profitable development, mostly under foreign auspices, in this eastern enclave. Because of Miskito autonomy, they received no economic benefits. With all this wealth sitting on their doorstep, the financially depressed Nicaraguans apparently could no longer ignore the Coast. Zelaya wasted little time in calling for the Nicaraguan "reincorporation" of the Mosquito Shore, a position based on questionable assumptions similar to those employed by the Americans for the "reannexation of Texas" and the "reoccupation of Oregon" back in the 1840's. He dispatched troops to Bluefields in February of 1894 and declared martial law. For some months previously, Nicaragua had been engaged in a border war with Honduras, and it was upon the basis of providing protection from a rumored invasion of Bluefields by Honduran forces that the government justified its military occupation of the town. It was later learned that the rumor of the invasion was started by the Nicaraguans themselves.¹⁸

On February 12, 1894, 300 Nicaraguan soldiers forcibly took possession of Bluefields, while the inhabitants of the town were asleep. The soldiers seized the government buildings and the archives of the Miskito Reservation; opened the prison to release the prisoners, including two murderers; and raised the Nicaraguan flag. As his excuse for attacking Bluefields, the Nicaraguan commissioner, General Carlos Lacayo, stated that the Miskito were being misgoverned by

Jamaican Blacks.¹⁹

The Nicaragua takeover was widely condemned and resisted locally as Chief Clarence protested to British authorities in Jamaica and members of the executive council organized an Indian force armed with Remington rifles. At the same time, American businessmen called for the United States intervention because they objected to the Nicaraguans export duty on bananas and the adoption of Spanish as the official language of the area. However, the American State Department insisted that Nicaraguan authority be established unequivocally over the Coast and admonished its consular agents to do nothing that would disparage Nicaraguan sovereignty.²⁰ With no viable stake left on the Coast, the British Foreign Office did not want to prejudice Anglo-American relations. At the same time, it could hardly overlook blatant violations of the 1860 treaty. In 1894, the world had reason to believe that the British would not allow a Latin American dictator to trample an official agreement. Both governments ordered warships to the area to appraise the situation.

The USS Kearsage ran aground on an uncharted Caribbean reef and was abandoned. HMS Cleopatra arrived in Bluefields on February 25. Negotiations took place between the Nicaraguan commissioner and the British. In order to restore law and order and end the state of siege which then existed, it was agreed that the Nicaraguan troops were to be withdrawn and replaced by British marines. English was restored as the

official language and both sides agreed to a temporary commission including Nicaraguan representatives. The British felt that a satisfactory conclusion to the matter had been reached and ordered the evacuation of the marines in late March. No sooner had the British marines left than, contrary to the agreement, some thirty Nicaraguan soldiers returned to Bluefields. The American residents sent a petition to the American consul objecting to the whole procedure and calling for the reestablishment of Miskito autonomy. But the position of the U.S. State Department remained unchanged, namely that the Mosquito Coast must be governed by Nicaraguan authorities.²¹

The unresolved tension in Bluefields smoldered throughout the spring of 1894 and then suddenly exploded on July 5 when a force of Miskito and Creoles opened fire on the headquarters of the Nicaraguan commissioner. Fighting continued throughout the night, and the next day, Robert Henry Clarence resumed his authority as chief executive. Miskito warriors had once again liberated their homeland and forced a Spanish speaking army to flee upriver. Clarence's move was a bold one. The British naval ship Cleopatra remained anchored just off Bluefields and he may have believed that the British would return to the Miskito's aid. The U.S. ambassador in London, Thomas Bayard, also believed that the British might come to the Miskito's assistance:

The trace of responsibility for the personal safety of a feeble remnant of an inferior and deteriorating race who were once under her

protection in some degree survives, and creates hesitation on the part of Great Britain formally and finally to abandon her obligation to interfere when her former proteges are threatened with gross injustice and oppression.²²

But the British soon made it clear to the Americans that their concerns were mainly perfunctory despite the "gross injustice and oppression." Chief Robert Henry Clarence and the entire Miskito population would be abandoned to their own resources. On July 7 American marines landed to "restore order." They rescued the embattled Nicaraguan forces and returned the commissioner to power. Backed by the American marines, the Nicaraguan commissioner reinstated the state of siege and martial law, declaring Chief Clarence and his supporters as rebels.²³

Zelaya mobilized over one thousand Nicaraguan troops and ordered them to Bluefields. The Nicaraguan reentry created a wild exodus of some 600 Indians and Creoles from Bluefields. Hearing reports that the Nicaraguans intended to kill them all, "some left all that they had and rushed to the wharves, willing to go in any sort of a craft, their only desire being to get away from Bluefields at once."²⁴ Chief Clarence was rescued by the British and carried on board a British war ship, along with 200 refugees, to Puerto Limon, Costa Rica, and then to Jamaica. He received asylum and a pension for life of four British pounds a month.²⁵ It was the least the British could do - the very least.

Meanwhile, Zelaya went about consolidating his newly won possession. According to Article 4 of the Treaty of Managua,

incorporation into the republic of Nicaragua could occur whenever the inhabitants of the Reserve freely chose it. The commissioner of the Coast quickly summoned delegates for just such a proposal. Eighty-two headmen were brought to Bluefields for the political convention, of these, only twelve were actual Indian headmen. Those who could not be persuaded or bribed to come down and sign were replaced by those who would, regardless of their rank or their nationality. Also, many of the eventual signatures that appeared on the document surrendering Miskito autonomy were from individuals who lived outside the Reserve.²⁶

The sham was complete. Appropriately enough, the new region was named the Department of Zelaya. The Miskito's former homeland was about to be pillaged, and would continue to be looted by its absentee landlords for years. The extent of the looting carried out by Zelaya can be gauged from the fact that shortly after the turn of the century, the Mosquito Coast, with about 10 percent of the population of the newly enlarged Nicaragua, contributed at least 40 percent of the total duties collected by the central government.²⁷ Zelaya sold to his cronies, or to foreigners, monopoly rights for the sale of almost every imaginable product and service in "his" new department. These included rights for the sale of native spirits and native-grown tobacco; monopoly fishing and turtle rights which infringed on traditional Miskito hunting grounds; monopoly rights to gather coconuts, to cut wood, to collect rubber, to butcher meat, to sell gasoline, and so on.

He imposed draconian sales taxes - sometimes as high as the value of the goods to be taxed. In addition, he introduced "municipal" taxes that financed little if anything on the Mosquito Coast but which went to help pay for hospitals and parks in Managua, Leon, and other cities outside of the former Reserve.²⁸

But Zelaya's pillage did not stop there. From then on, all teaching in the region's schools was to be in Spanish - a language that scarcely anybody knew or understood. Also, Zelaya sold monopoly rights for the purchase of Mosquito Coast bananas to a then little-known American company called United Fruit. Miskito growers were forced to accept United Fruit's prices, or none at all. Zelaya, still hailed by some Nicaraguans as the "father" of his country, had sired the model of the modern "banana republic."

All the while, the British displayed a marked ambivalence to their former allies. Robert Henry Clarence never returned to the Mosquito Coast. In January 1908, he died at the age of thirty-five in the Public General Hospital of Kingston, following an operation.²⁹ Meanwhile, the economic boom of the late nineteenth century declined. The mahogany concessions were exhausted and the interior gold mines became unproductive. Hopes for a Nicaraguan canal evaporated with the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. Economic decline fostered an increasing indifference to the Caribbean Coast by the Nicaraguan government. The former proud and powerful Miskito nation became a poverty-ridden

backwater of little importance. Despite Britain's unpropitious stance, Miskito opposition to Nicaraguan occupation of their territory continued and a petition with 1,800 signatures was presented by citizens of the Coast to the British Consul stating their dire situation:

... we will be in the hands of a government and people who have not the slightest interest, sympathy or good feeling for the inhabitants of the Mosquito Reservation; and as our manners, customs, religions, laws and languages are not in accord, there can never be a unity...³⁰

The British response was blunt:

Nevertheless, the time has gone by when the Reserve could be ruled by a Government composed of half-educated negroes. The natives look back with sorrow to the time when their little settlement was free from discord and strife, but the march of civilization has driven that away, and the time has come when they must face the new conditions, and must take into serious consideration the altered circumstances of the country.³¹

British leaders were reluctant to acknowledge the crucial role they played in the dispossession of the Miskito. At the same time, they delivered the coup de grace with the signing of the Harrison-Altamiro Treaty in 1905. This treaty abrogated the Treaty of Managua and formally recognized absolute Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Coast.³² The betrayal of a people was complete. Britain's culpability in the matter would be sufficient enough if she only sat by idly while her former ally was stripped of lands, government, traditions, economic livelihood, and self determination. As it was, the British negotiators actively participated in the surrender of territories that were not under their control.

Miskito autonomy was not an item which alleged "protectors" were entitled to bargain away. In the future, the Miskito would evince a guarded stance towards those who professed to be their supporter, defender, or ally.

Conclusions

Throughout the period investigated in this study, the Miskito displayed an unwavering support of their alliance with the British. Both parties had much to gain from this coalition. The Miskito were able to grow and expand as a nation while the British acquired important military allies and trading opportunities. The two partners combined effectively to keep Spain out of the Atlantic Coast region. In this early period the British relied heavily on the Miskito, but the natives realized the potential benefits of procuring the friendship of the British and so fostered the relationship.

Many writers have depicted the Miskito as mere pawns, manipulated and controlled by the whims of the British. However, this view ignores important considerations. Miskito independence and autonomy were demonstrated from the very earliest moments of their nexus with the British. It was the Miskito king, Jeremy I, who initiated and secured the alliance by effectively playing on the fears of the British. After the initial formation of the partnership, the British then realized that the Miskito would be a powerful and useful

confederate in their designs for the region. They sought a closer working arrangement and finally established a protectorate over the Miskito. At the time, it was agreed that the protectorship did not provide the British with territorial sovereignty since the region was still firmly in the hands of the Miskito. This agreement would later have important implications for the Miskito.

The close working arrangement established by the two nations resulted in a number of transformations in Miskito culture. A number of western researchers have examined these changes, as well as the Miskito's affinity for absorbing outsiders into their fold, and have pronounced that the Miskito were an historically created tribe. The present study has argued that the Miskito demonstrated a culturally distinct society before, as well as after, European contact. Their society did go through manifest changes but these were adaptations and not the result of the parturition of a new society and culture. Few historians would argue that the Russia of Peter the Great, with its overt fondness for the accouterments of French culture, emerged as a new society culturally distinct from all that went on before. Similarly, it cannot be argued that the Miskito's preference for British trappings squeezed them into a unique and distinct society apart from all that they were.

Economic interests came to be an significant factor in the alliance. Both the Miskito and the British were able to accumulate wealth through their trading practises. A

sympiotic pattern of supply and demand permeated their dealings. But even in this, the Miskito maintained considerable independence of action. The Miskito subordinated bordering tribes and expanded their slave raids. Their trade in slaves eventually came to an end, not as a result of British pressure, but because of the laws of supply and demand.

A further indication of Miskito independence and force of will is exhibited in the many battles that they fought against the Spanish. Time and time again, the natives demonstrated effectiveness as a unified fighting force. Whether fighting alone or with their British allies, the Miskito defended their homeland against outside incursions. Because of their fierce and determined resistance, the Spanish were unable to secure a foothold on the Mosquito Coast. On occasion, the Miskito's hatred of the Spanish was vented in violent outbursts such as the Quepriva massacre and the slaughter of the Terry Mission. These events can only be justified in the explanation that the Miskito were forced to fight a terrible and desperate war to retain their traditional homelands.

The Miskito believed that the British were faithful allies that could be relied upon to help stop the transgressions of foreigners in their territory. To this end, the natives remained faithful to their British friends. They provided refuge for harassed woodcutters and actively participated in the battles provoked by the British. The

Spanish attempted to lure the Miskito away from the British, but the Indians would have little to do with them. Their loyalty was beyond reproach. The British repaid the Miskito's fealty by trading them off for concerns over Gibraltar in the 1786 treaty they signed with Spain.

Although the British abandoned the Miskito, the natives maintained their devotion and urged their former allies to return. In the meantime, they resisted Spanish attempts to colonize and conquer their land until, at last, they evicted the intruders in 1800. Eventually, the British realized their errors and began a gradual return to the Coast. Old trading patterns resumed and new colonizing schemes took shape. The two partners restored their former allegiance.

By the 1840's the British began to take a more aggressive stance throughout all of Central America and this influenced their dealings with the Miskito. Also during this period, the United States set out to dominate the same region. The Miskito found themselves caught in the middle of a battle between these two great powers over the strategic port of San Juan del Norte. American agents such as Ephraim Squier attempted to portray the Miskito Indians and kings as drunks, idlers, and servitors of the British. While his statements may have been true of a few individuals, it was definitely not the case for the great majority. In fact, most Miskito leaders were highly educated individuals respected by their people.

Despite Miskito constancy, the British again let down

the people they had agreed to assist under a protectorship. American pressures combined with divergent British interests forced the government of Great Britain to bestow sovereignty over the Mosquito Coast on the Nicaraguan government. This required the British to presume that they possessed something which in fact they did not - Miskito sovereignty. The British role of protector became a sham as the Miskito lost their rights to territorial autonomy, self-government, self-determination, and their traditional methods of economic livelihood.

But the betrayal was not yet complete. In 1894 the British sat by as Chief Henry Clarence had his powers stripped by invading American and Nicaraguan soldiers. Finally, in 1905 the British washed their hands completely of the Miskito. Their loyalty had served its purpose and was no longer required. The Miskito paid dearly for their trust and devotion. But they learned an important lesson from their past. Even today, the Miskito continue their struggle for independence and autonomy. Foreign assistance is accepted, but they are wary about strings that may be attached. The guidance and direction of their struggle comes from within. The Miskito will accept no new acts of betrayal from erstwhile friends.

Notes to Chapter 5

- ¹ Hertslet's Commercial Treaties, Vol. XI, p. 448.
- ² "General Correspondence, 1849-1905," List of Foreign Office Records, (New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1965), Vol. III, p. 80.
- ³ "Central America, 1856-1886," British Documents On Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers From the Foreign Office, Confidential Print, Series D, Latin America, 1845-1914, ed., George Philip, Vol. 7, (New York: University Publications of America, 1992), p. 2. Mr. Wyke to the Earl of Clarendon, August 27, 1856.
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 77. Lord Napier to the Earl of Malmesbury, July 31, 1858.
- ⁵ Cortney De Kalb, "Nicaragua: Studies on the Mosquito Shore in 1892," Journal of the American Geographical Society, 25, (1893), p. 273.
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 274.
- ⁷ "Colonel Alvarez, June 17, 1864," AGCA, B1.18, leg. 223, exp. 19.
- ⁸ Hertslet's Commercial Treaties, Vol. XV, p. 276.
- ⁹ Dozier, p. 116.
- ¹⁰ James Parsons, "English-Speaking Settlements in the Western Caribbean," Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, 16, (1954), p. 11.
- ¹¹ De Kalb, p. 256.
- ¹² R. L. Morrow, "A Conflict Between the Commercial

Interests of the United States and Its Foreign Policy," Hispanic American Historical Review, 10, (February, 1930), p. 3.

¹³ Robert N. Keely, "Nicaragua and the Mosquito Coast," Popular Science Monthly, 45, (June, 1894), p. 167.

¹⁴ De Kalb, p. 260.

¹⁵ Keely, p. 162.

¹⁶ This spurious headman's name was Frank Thomas. It is apparent that he was not a Miskito Indian and was more likely connected to one of the American banana companies. See Keely, p. 166.

¹⁷ W. Nelson, "The Mosquito Reserve," Harper's Weekly, 22, (December, 1894), p. 1219.

¹⁸ Few people believed Zelaya's preposterous claim. The Honduran armed forces lacked the ability to launch an effective naval campaign. Also, the Hondurans would have been wary of antagonizing Britain through an attack on Bluefields.

¹⁹ The Times, (London: February 28, 1894), p.3.

²⁰ R. L. Morrow, p. 3.

²¹ Dozier, p. 151.

²² "Bayard to Gresham, August 10, 1894," Foreign Relations of the United States: Nicaragua, 1894, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), p. 243.

²³ Depositions collected by the Nicaraguans give a different version of what happened, presenting the Nicaraguans in the role of liberators. See "Documents

relating to the Affairs in Bluefields," Foreign Relations of the United States: Nicaragua, 1894, pp. 249-253.

24 New York Times, (New York: August 17, 1894).

25 Nelson, p. 1219.

26 "Central America, 1887-1914," British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers From the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Series D, Latin America, 1845-1914, ed. George Philip, Vol. 8, p. 177.

27 Cited in, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, "The Miskito Indians of Nicaragua," The Minority Rights Group, 79, (1988), p. 5.

28 Dozier, p. 161.

29 H. Luke, Caribbean Circuit, (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1950), p. 77.

30 "Further Correspondence Respecting the Mosquito Reserve," British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers From the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Series D, Latin America, 1845-1914, ed. George Philip, Vol. 8, Central America, 1887-1914, p. 179.

31 Ibid, p. 184.

32 Hertslet's Commercial Treaties, Vol. XV, p. 321.

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