

Zeferina

(fl. nineteenth century),

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African slave, probably Angolan and daughter of a woman named Amalia, probably brought enslaved to Brazil, according to the narrative of Maria Oliveira (1988). Zeferina lived in Bahia, a northeast Brazilian port that served as colonial capital until 1763 and a site of transatlantic slave trading into the mid-nineteenth century. She was one of the *mocambeiras* (runaways) of Quilombo do Urubu, a community inhabited by fifty other *mocambeiros* and former slaves (most of them Nagô) situated in Lagoa do Urubu, Cajazeiras, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Salvador.

In 1826 Zeferina took part in what would be later known as the Revolta do Quilombo do Urubu, an uprising that sought to secure land and fight against the slave system. João Reis (2003) has argued that the uprising broke out after the *quilombolas* (Maroons) had been found smuggling meat and flour to their hideout. As they feared being denounced to local authorities, on 16 December, the *quilombolas* preemptively took up arms against those who might accuse them, also attacking farmers who lived nearby in retaliation for their discovery. After that, the rebels headed toward Urubu, in Cabula—another neighborhood in Salvador—where their revolt was marked by shouts of “Morra Branco E Viva Negro” (Die White and Live Black), based on official documentation provided by the authorities and the few sources available for research on rural communities in colonial Brazil. In their fight against repression, the *quilombolas* killed three slave hunters and injured three others. Those same survivors reinforced a picket line formed by twelve policemen from Salvador and twenty-five militiamen from the district of Pirajá.

According to Pierre Verger (1987), the armed forces believed that the *quilombolas* were plotting a rebellion and attacked the area. Among many statements made by members of the punitive expedition that vanquished the revolt, a soldier claimed he had seen *algumas pretas* (some black women), among them one named Zeferina. In the absence of much prior mention of women joining the *quilombos* or *mocambos*, what is known about Zeferina is impressionistic. She is mentioned as having fought back oppressors using the bow and arrow, instilling in her companions the courage to resist those who wanted to put an end to Quilombo do Urubu. Zeferina was later captured by an anti-*mocambo* expedition and became the sole woman sentenced to hard labor in prison. Zeferina stated in an official inquiry that, alongside her companions, she had awaited the arrival of numerous slaves who, it had been rumored, arrived in Salvador on Christmas Eve. They had chosen such a date to invade the capital city in order to kill white people and gain their freedom.

Zeferina was recognized as the bravest warrior during the uprising, and would be the last one to surrender; she was arrested by many soldiers but mistakenly considered a *rainha* (queen) by the president of the province. Whether as a queen, leader, *quilombola*, or warrior, Zeferina's saga in the woods of Urubu will forever remain alive in the minds of activists and inhabitants of the Salvador neighborhood of Cabula. Zeferina demonstrated how women played a prominent role in inspiring people to rebel during the era of slavery in Brazil.

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