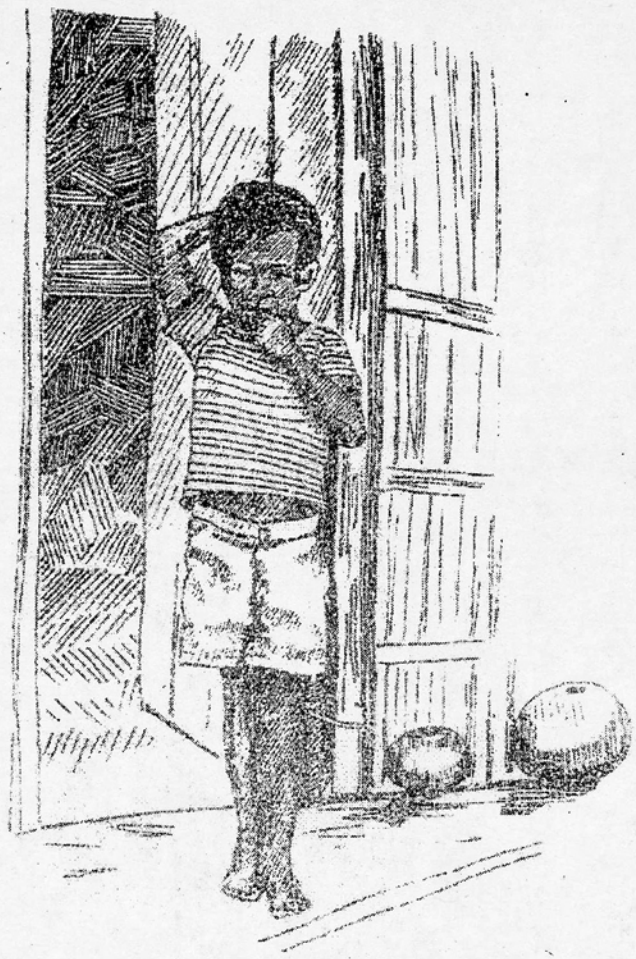
Collective Memory

The African Presence in Latin America

A Study Guide on the Maroon Community of Esmeraldas, Ecuador



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Preface

The Network of Educators on the Americas (NECA) has coordinated the production of this Study Guide in conjunction with the March-April 1993 U.S. tour of Juan García Salazar. It provides resources for classroom study of the African presence in Latin America.

For each of the 90 million people of African heritage now living in Latin America, there is a story going back generations. The stories form a rich legacy of struggle and survival. Each is different, but all have their beginning in Africa. They are stories that have been ignored by official national histories and omitted from the textbooks. Indeed, this history is not commonly known by many Latin Americans, and most North Americans are unaware of the African contributions to Latin American culture and history.

In this brief study guide, we can only tell a few of these stories. We focus on the *maroons*, Africans who bravely threw off the chains of slavery and established independent communities within colonial Latin America. In particular, we'll learn about the history and culture of Esmeraldas, a province in northwestern Ecuador that is home to one of the most interesting maroon communities, and where African traditions can still be seen and felt.

Juan García Salazar grew up in a small village in Esmeraldas near the mouth of the Santiago River. His mother is Afro-Ecuadorian; his father came from Spain as a refugee from the Spanish Civil War. Driven by the questions "Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I fit in?," he began collecting and studying oral poetry, rituals, myths, folk medicine, music, and household artifacts of Afro-Ecuadorian communities. In addition to preserving this cultural heritage, he works tirelessly as a community organizer to empower his community with survival skills and as an advocate for recognition of Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture within all segments of Ecuadorian society.

We welcome your comments and suggestions for future publications on this topic.

Credits

This Study Guide was compiled by Network of Educators on the Americas (NECA) and members of the Coalition for African American and Latino Unity (CAALÚ). Contributors include Allen Belkin, Charles Kleymeyer, Kemba A. Maish, Roland Roebuck and Juan García Salazar with advice and assistance from Arlette Clayton, Erica Gilbertson, Dr. Linda Haywood, Marguerite Lukes, Deborah Menkart, Bea Rief, and Deanna Wesson.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the D.C. Community Humanities Council.

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Introduction: The African Presence in Latin America

It is estimated that between ten and twenty million Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th centuries. There is also evidence that Africans visited the American continent prior to the arrival of the Spanish, and that Africans were among Columbus' crew on his voyages to the Americas.

As many as 125 million people of African heritage now live in the nations of the western hemisphere, including up to 90 million in Latin America (see table, p. 5). Yet, even in many countries with sizable populations of African descent (*Afro-Latinos)*, their history is hidden, their cultural roots are ignored and their contributions to the development of the nation are unacknowledged. In addition, they often occupy the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder and receive less than their share of government services.

Despite having been uprooted from their traditional homelands and subjected to nearly four centuries of enslavement along with deliberate efforts to destroy their culture, strong links to Africa survive among Afro-Latinos. But the "deculturalizing" pressures did not end with the abolition of slavery. They came to take on more subtle forms. An intricate class-system emerged, based on gradations of skin color, degree of African blood and adoption of European lifestyles.

Four joined Cowrie shells signify: *We want to live together*

Mestizaje, the genetic and cultural mixing among Europeans, Africans and indigenous people is celebrated as the cultural identity of many Latin American nations, but little attention is given to the African contribution to the mix. In fact, the term *mestizo* is commonly defined more narrowly to refer only to people of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage. The word *blanqueamiento* or "whitening" came to refer to an effort to advance within Latin American society by diluting one's African heritage. In contrast, *negritude*, a literary and cultural movement originating in the French-speaking Caribbean islands, encourages pride in African roots and found strong resonance among Afro-Latinos.

In this century, there are new threats to the cultural identity of Afro-Latinos. Most devastating are the spread of radios and televisions into remote areas and the implementation of standardized school curricula. Both promote images of society in which the African role is missing. Only the negative stereotypes persist. For centuries, Afro-Latino traditions have been passed from one generation to the next. Now, images on TV screens and in textbooks could have stronger appeal than stories told by grandparents.

In a number of countries, Afro-Latinos are now working to reclaim their culture, uncover their history and achieve recognition by legal, educational and cultural systems. Organizations have been formed in many of these countries and meetings have been held, both national and international. For example, in the Esmeraldas region of Ecuador, Afro-Ecuadorians have formed groups such as the *Confraternidad de Negros Ecuatorianos* (Brotherhood of Black Ecuadorians); *La Mascara de Oro* (The Mask of Gold); *Amigos del Bosque* (Friends of the Forest); *Grupo de Teatro* (Theatre Group); and *Lamento Campesino* (Lament of the Countryside). They have held a series of "Encounters on Afro-Ecuadorian History" and have collaborated on similar projects in other countries.

These efforts gained momentum in recent years as a result of attention surrounding the Quincentenary of Columbus' arrival. A hemisphere-wide campaign to focus attention on the *victims* of the European invasion of the Americas was named *500 Years of Indigenous, Grassroots and Black Resistance* in recognition of the shared experiences of African-Americans, indigenous people and the lower economic classes during the past five centuries.

Décimas: Poetry of Afro-Ecuadorians

Collected by Juan García Salazar
Translated by Edith Grossman

The literature of Afro-Ecuadorians has centered on oral poetry. It has been given the Spanish name *décima*, although it is very different from the classic compositions of 16th century Spain of the same name.

The American décima is a child of both African and Hispanic culture. Although the language and form is Spanish, and Christian motifs frequently appear, it is Africa which provided the framework that explains why these poems have been so important to Ecuadorians of African descent. In Africa, there were two kinds of poets: chroniclers and storytellers (or balladeers). The chroniclers were highly respected peeople who knew by heart the genealogy of the village or clan chief, recounted heroic deeds, and recorded the customs of the groups. The balladeers, on the other hand, were known for their wit as well as their memory. Balladeers preserved the proverbs, the stories, and the anecdotal history of the group.

In Ecuador, the *decimero* (the reciter of décimas) is both chronicler and balladeer. Decimeros may compose their own poetry or the décimas may be handed down, but the language is highly figurative and rhythmic to make memorization easier and to display artistic mastery. The style feels African and traditional African themes are often used.

Basically, there are two kinds of décimas. *Décimas a lo divino* have their roots in Catholicism, the only religion the slaves could safely practice. *Décimos a lo humano* range across the whole social life of coastal Ecuador. In these poems, the poet can interpret and narrate his community's experience - often the community's only historical record. Other poems poke fun at pompous politicians, Hispanic culture or local attitudes. Some are simply good stories.

Afro-Ecuadorian poets also engage in *argumentos*, or poetic duals. One decimero recites a poem and the next poet must respond. Grounded in spontaneity, these literary faceoffs challenge the competing poets' verbal dexterity, their wit, and their knowledge of the Bible and secular subjects (even such unlikely ones as mathematics).

Juan García Salazar has traveled throughout Esmeraldas Province in northwestern Ecuador, interviewing decimeros and recording décimas. Here is one of the décimas he collected.

LA PREGUNTA DEL NEGRO

Como ignorante que soy
me precisa preguntar
si el color blanco es virtud
para mandarme a blanquear.

El ser negra no es afrenta
ni color que quita fama
porque de zapatos negros
se viste la mejor dama.
Las cejas y las pestañas
y su negra cabellera,
que lo analice cualquiera
que interrogando es que estoy
me precisa preguntar
como ignorante que soy.

Pregunto sin vacilar
que ésto no comprendo yo;
si el sabio que hizo la tierra
de qué color la dejó,
de qué pasta la formó
a nuestra primer padre Adán
y el que me quiera tachar
que me sepa contestar,
como ignorante que soy,
me precisa preguntar.

Pregunto porque me conviene,
si ser negro es un delito.
Desde que nací a este mundo,
letras blancas yo no he visto,
negra fue la cruz de Cristo
donde murió el Redentor,
de negro vistió María
viendo morir a Jesús.
Me precisa preguntar
si el color blanco es virtud.

El negro con su color
y el blanco con su blancura,
todos vamos a quedar
en el negra sepultura.
Se acaban las hermosuras
de las blancas señoritas,
se acaba el que más critica
y el del color sin igual
y si el color blanco es virtud
para mandarme a blanquear.

THE BLACK MAN'S QUESTION

Like the ignorant man I am
I really have to ask:
if the color white is virtue
why don't you whiten me?

It's no insult to be black,
don't let it give you the blues,
even society ladies
wear their shiny black shoes...
and black eyebrows and black lashes
and beautiful long black hair.
Let anyone here explain,
my question is very fair.
I really have to ask
like the ignorant man I am.

I ask without hesitation,
it's something I don't understand:
when the Lord who made us all
mixed his water and sand,
what color clay did he use
to give father Adam shape?
And if you want to shut me up
first answer- then I'll shut my trap.
Like the ignorant man I am
I really have to ask.

I ask (because I want to)
if being black is a crime.
I've never seen white letters
since the beginning of time.
Christ's holy cross was black
that's where he died,
and Mother Mary wore black
when Her Son Jesus died.
I really have to ask
if the color white is a virtue

The black man with his blackness
and the white man with his white,
all of us come to end
in the tomb as black as night.
Then, the beauty of white ladies
will end from pole to pole,
and the critic will be finished
and the man as black as coal.
If the color white is virtue,
why don't you whiten me?

Adapted from García Salazar, J. (1984). "Black poetry of coastal Ecuador" in *Grassroots Development*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1984).

Table 1: The African Presence in the Americas

COUNTRY	Low estimate Population (thousands)	% of total	High estimate Population (thousands)	% of total
Central America				
Belize	92	46.9	112	57.0
Costa Rica	66	2.0	66	2.0
El Salvador	**	**	**	**
Guatemala	***	***	***	***
Honduras	112	2.0	280	5.0
Nicaragua	387	9.0	559	13.0
Panama	35	14.0	1,837	73.5
South America				
Argentina	0	0.0	**	**
Bolivia	158	2.0	158	2.0
Brazil	9,477	5.9	53,097	33.0
Chile	*	*	*	*
Columbia	4,886	14.0	7,329	21.0
Ecuador	573	5.0	1,147	10.0
French Guiana	37	42.4	58	66.0
Guyana	222	29.4	321	42.6
Paraguay	156	3.5	156	3.5
Peru	1,356	6.0	2,192	9.7
Suriname	146	39.8	151	41.0
Uruguay	38	1.2	38	1.2
Venezuela	1,935	9.0	2,150	10.0
The Caribbean				
Antigua & Barbuda	85	97.9	85	97.9
Bahamas	194	72.0	223	85.0
Barbados	205	80.0	245	95.8
Bermuda	38	61.0	39	61.3
Cuba	3,559	33.9	6,510	62.0
Dominican Rep.	847	11.0	6,468	84.0
Grenada	72	75.0	81	84.0
Guadaloupe	292	87.0	292	87.0
Haiti	6,500	94.0	6,900	100.0
Jamaica	1,976	76.0	2,376	91.4
St. Lucia	121	90.3	121	90.3
St. Vincent & Gren.	94	84.5	105	95.0
Trinidad & Tobago	480	40.0	516	43.0
North America				
Canada	260	1.0	260	1.0
Mexico	474	0.5	474	0.5
United States	29,986	12.1	29,986	12.1
TOTAL	64,859	9.0	124,332	17.2

This table is adapted from figures compiled by Rodolfo Monge Oviedo in "The Black Americas: 1492-1992" iin*Report on the Americas*, Vol. XXV, Number 4. There are several reaons for the wide discrepancy between the high and low estimates for many countries. Primary among these is the large number of residents of mixed blood, with differences of opinion regarding who should be counted. In some cases, the low estimate includes only people of pure or nearly pure African descent, while the high estimate includes residents with lesser degrees of African blood.

Some countries have no sources of data, official or otherwise, while others keep such data secret. Information from the *Britannica Yearbook* is used as a base.

* Indicates that the presence of population of African descent is acknowledged but no figures are given

** Indicates that no figures are available.

***Among those countries without available statstics, note that there is a substantial Afro-Guatemalan community, mostly living along the Caribbean coast, centered in the port cities of Puerto Barrios and Livingston.

Map: Population of African Descent in Latin America

The population of African descent has disappeared, or become almost totally amalgamated (1% or less)

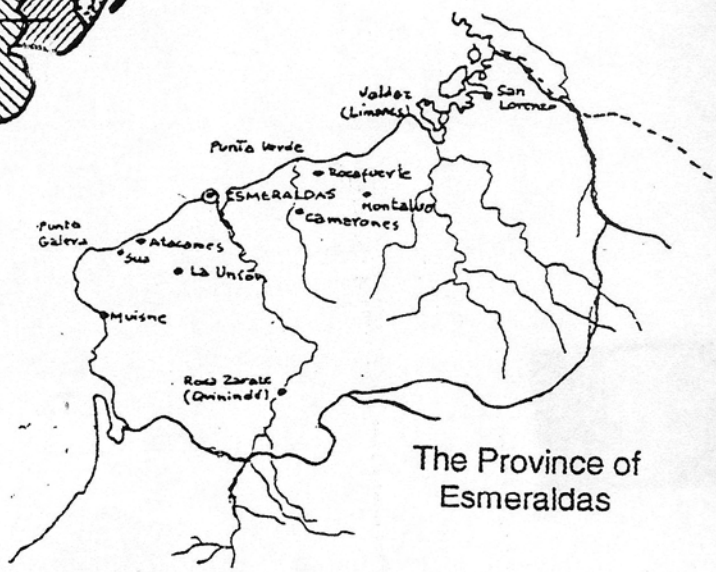
A population of African descent exists, but it is a small minority (2-5% of the population or less)

MEXICO
HAITI
CUBA
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
PUERTO RICO
GUATEMALA
ELSALVADOR
HONDURAS
NICARAGUA
Portobelo
COSTA RICA
PANAMA
COLOMBIA
VENEZUELA
GUYANA
SURINAM
FRENCH GUIANA
Esmeraldas
ECUADOR
BRAZIL
PERU
Lima
BOLIVIA
PARAGUAY
CHILE
ARGENTINA
URUGUAY

A significant minority of African descent (6-30%) exists in these states.

The largest population group in these countries is probably of African descent.

The Republic of Ecuador



The Province of Esmeraldas

Latin America map adapted from Rout, Jr., L.B. (1976). *The African experience in Spanish America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ecuador and Esmeraldas maps adapted from Naranjo, M. *La cultura popular en el Ecuador*. Centro Interamericano de Artesanias y Artes Populares (CIDAP)

Historical Overview: The Maroons of Ecuador

In 1501, Nicolás Ovando was appointed the first Spanish governor of Hispaniola (the island which is now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). When he sailed to take charge of the colony the following year, he brought with him *ladino* slaves. *Ladinos* were Africans who had been brought to Spain, converted to Christianity and learned Spanish language and customs.*

One of them promptly ran away, and joined the Taíno Arawaks, the indigenous people living in the mountains of the island. This dauntless individual, whose name is lost to history, became the first *maroon* –the Spanish word is *cimarrón*–referring to escaped slaves.

Many, many would follow in his or her footsteps. In addition, it wasn't long before Africans began to band together in rebellion against enslavement. For those who were caught fleeing or participating in insurrections, the punishment was harsh, often barbarous. But the yearning for freedom is integral to the human spirit and few years went by without a major slave uprising somewhere in the colonies.

By 1516, ladinos were seen as rebellious and prone to ally with or incite the indigenous populations. Thus began the import of slaves directly from Africa. These *bozales*, as they were called, came from different parts of Africa and spoke many different African languages. Since they could not initially communicate with each other, and besides, were unfamiliar with European ways, it was thought that they would be easier to control. But rebellions continued. And though many Africans lived out their lives in slavery, few would miss an opportunity to flee.

The strength of the maroons, and the even more threatening prospect of a full-scale slave insurrection, was a continuing preoccupation for the Spanish, as well as the British, French, Portuguese and Dutch colonial authorities. Efforts to recapture maroons and squelch rebellions before they began took on the proportions of major military operations. More and more gruesome tortures were designed to punish captured maroons, as well as those who aided them.

Therefore, the two big concerns of maroons were to defend their newly-won freedom, and to meet basic needs of food and shelter. In the process, they created new societies, drawing on African roots to design the structure of those societies, and adapting to the conditions at hand. For their defense, they often settled in remote areas and built fortified villages called *palenques*.* They developed strategies of guerrilla warfare, including raiding Spanish settlements and convoys in order to liberate slaves and obtain food, supplies and armaments.

By the early 16th century, Peru had become a major center of Spanish exploitation of its colonies. To reach Peru from Spain (or from Africa), ships sailed to Portobelo on the Caribbean coast of Panama. People and cargo were then transported across the isthmus of Panama and reloaded onto ships at Panama City for the trip to Callao, a seaport near Lima. In addition, Spanish ships from New Spain (Mexico) and Guatemala traveled along the Pacific coast of South America.

The last part of the trip was particularly difficult, sailing against the winds and currents. In addition, much of the shoreline is swampy and inhospitable, making landings for supplies difficult and dangerous. The coast of what would later be called *Esmeraldas* – 'land of Emeralds'–was particularly hazardous to navigation and there were many shipwrecks.

There's no record of when the first African arrived in Esmeraldas, nor whether he or she might have been a survivor of a shipwreck or a fugitive from one of the many Spanish expeditions that passed through the area. But by 1540, it is certain that small groups of maroons were living in the area, perhaps in isolation or perhaps in contact with Cayapas Indians who inhabited the region.

One of the first of whom we know any details was a ladino named Andrés Mangache. He had been brought from Spain to Nicaragua and in 1541, was on board a ship bound for Peru. The ship landed at Esmeraldas for provisions. The slaves (both African and indigenous) were sent to look for food and Andrés escaped with an indigenous woman from Nicaragua. They organized one of the first maroon societies in that region, which became known as the Mangaches. When their village was destroyed by the Spanish in 1584, they split into two groups but

* The term *ladino* also has other meanings. In Guatemala, it refers to people of European or mestizo rather than indigenous heritage and/or lifestyle. In Spain, it refers to a dialect of Spanish spoken by the Jews of Spain.

* Other terms for such settlements were *quilombo* (Brazil), *mocombo*, *cumbe* (Venezuela), *ladeira* or *mabis* (Cuba)

their descendants continued to influence politics in the region for generations.

Certainly, the largest and most important maroon group in the region was called the Illescas, led by Alonso de Illescas. Alonso was one of 23 Africans on a ship that left Panama–the history books disagree on the year which may be anywhere from 1553 to 1650. After being stranded 30 days without wind, the ship landed in a cove at Esmeraldas and the Africans were sent ashore to look for food.

There are different versions of what happened next. Some say a wind suddenly came up and drove the ship onto a reef; others say the Africans murdered the Spaniards; still others say the Africans hid in the jungle, then snuck aboard ship and made off with all the provisions while the Spanish were off looking for them.

Under Alonso's leadership, the Illescas achieved rule over all the African and indigenous people of what is now northern Ecuador, and kept Spanish authority to a minimum in the region.

As the settlement of Peru intensified, there was more shipping traffic and therefore, more shipwrecks. In the second half of the 16th century, there were many free Africans living among the indigenous inhabitants of the Pacific coast of what are now Ecuador and Colombia.

There are conflicting stories about how the maroons and the indigenous people got along. Most likely, there were times of cooperation and times of conflict. By 1577, maroons and indigenous were organized together to maintain sovereignity against Spanish efforts to impose Spanish authority. The Spanish so feared this obvious alliance against a common enemy that, throughout the colonies, they did all in their power to limit contact between Africans and indigenous people.

By the end of the century, a good portion of this region was totally controlled by groups of maroons that formed a republic of free blacks and *zambos* (people of mixed African and indigenous blood). The Spanish authorities were unable to bring this area under their control despite several military campaigns, and by 1598, had decided to negotiate with the maroons. Among the negotiators for the maroons were Francisco and Juan, two of Andrés Mangache's sons, who were each given the title Captain by the Royal Audience of Quito.

The double spiral signifies: *The creation by **nyame** (heaven) and **nyankpon** (earth)*

There were other migrations of people of African descent to Esmeraldas. Far inland, in a mountain valley called Chota, a Jesuit settlement kept slaves to work a large plantation. Some escaped from time to time and followed the Chota River downstream to settle in Esmeraldas. Others remained in the Chota Valley, and their descendents continue to maintain African traditions high in the mountains of Ecuador.

The abolition of slavery in Ecuador was a long and drawn-out process, which began around the time that independence from Spain was won. Throughout South America, many Afro-Latinos served in the armies of liberation—some say they were a majority.

Initially, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela were one country called Gran Colombia. The first anti-slavery law was passed in 1821. When Ecuador separated from Gran Colombia in 1830, that law was declared to be still in effect. Nevertheless, it would be nearly thirty more years before slavery was ended as an institution in Ecuador. When freedom was finally achieved, many of the former slaves migrated to Esmeraldas.

Another influx of African culture came at the end of the 19th century, when Afro-Caribbean workers from Barbados and Jamaica were brought to Ecuador to build the Quito-Guayaquil railroad. When the railroad was completed in 1908, many settled in Esmeraldas.

Today, in Esmeraldas and in the Chota Valley, the African cultural heritage lives on, evident in music, dance, stories, religion, traditional medicine and the organization of communities.

SOURCES:

García Salazar, J. (1989). *Cimarronaje en el pacífico sur: Historia y tradición, el caso de Esmeraldas, Ecuador*. Masters Degree thesis, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

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A Gallery of Maroon Leaders ...

BAYANO
Maroon King
16th Century

The Africans didn't accept as "normal" their status as slaves. The desire for liberty lived in their souls, and they never missed a chance to flee to the jungle. There, they could live according to their laws and customs. The Spaniards called them *cimarrones* or maroons.

Bayano didn't tolerate slavery for long and fled to the mountains of Panama, where he was chosen King of a community of 2,000 maroons.

He organized attacks against Spanish plantations and against convoys on the roads. The Spanish sent many expeditions against him and his people, but none were successful. Finally, Bayano was invited to negotiate a peace treaty but he was treacherously captured. He was sent to Peru, where he received honors from the Viceroy, and then was brought to Spain where he died in prison

YANGA
Black King
1564-1612

Yanga was born in Africa, a member of the Yanga Baru tribe of the Upper Nile region. As a youth, he was taken prisoner by an enemy tribe and sold to the slave traders who sent him to New Spain (Mexico) in 1579. Shortly after his arrival, he escaped, taking refuge in the steep mountains of Veracruz.

With other escaped slaves, they formed free towns called *palenques* where they lived according to African traditions. Yanga's immediately became leader due to his charisma, his wisdom and his ability.

On January 26, 1609 a Spanish force was sent against the palenques, but was repelled by maroons under Yanga's command. Later that year, Yanga founded the town of San Lorenzo de los Negros.

He was betrayed, captured and executed by the Spaniards on Easter Sunday, 1612.

ALONSO DE ILLESCAS
Ecuadorian Hero
1528-1585

Born in Cape Verde, he was brought to Spain at the age of 7 as a house servant. He learned the customs, language, ways of education and of warfare of the Spanish. These things served him well when he came to the colonies at the age of 25.

En route to Lima, Peru, he led a group of slaves in an escape from a ship off the coast of Esmeraldas in October, 1553. With his diplomatic and military skills, he won the sympathy and respect of the indigenous and the Africans alike. He created an alliance that resisted Spanish expeditions, preserving their dignity and liberty.

He refused the honor of being appointed governor of Esmeraldas because he considered the autonomy of blacks and indigenous more valuable. For nearly 200 years, the Spanish had little authority in this region of Ecuador.

Drawings and text adapted from *Afro-Americanos 500 años*. (1993) Esmeraldas, Ecuador: Centro Cultural Afro-Ecuatoriano.
Nanny story adapted from *Caribbean connections: Overview of regional history*. (1991). Washington: NECA & EPICA

ZUMBI
Leader of Palmares
1655-1695

Zumbi was born free in Palmares, a maroon nation founded at the beginning of the 16th century. At its height, Palmares had about 20,000 residents and controlled a large area in what is now Brazil.

As an infant, Zumbi was captured in a raid on Palmares and raised by a priest. At the age of 15, he returned to Palmares, and eventually became its leader.

In 1693, the Portuguese sent an army of over 6,000 mercenaries and Palmares was destroyed. Zumbi escaped, but was killed two years later. Parts of his body were put on display in Recife as a warning to those who would resist or flee from slavery.

For his bravery and ability, Zumbi is considered a national hero of Afro-Brazilians, inspiring past and present struggles for liberation.

NANNY
of the Windward Maroons
18th Century

Nanny's origin is the Ashanti people of West Africa, but it isn't known when she was born nor whether she was born in Africa or Jamaica. She was leader of a maroon community called Nanny Town in eastern Jamaica, known for its high degree of organization and the respect accorded to women and children.

In 1655 the English took Jamaica from Spain, and in 1730, they discovered and attacked Nanny Town. Nanny proved to be a genius at guerilla warfare strategy and also used Ashanti magic to weaken the enemy and determine the best time for attack.

She vowed never to make peace with the English and was bitterly disappointed when her brother Cudjoe, leader of the western maroons, signed a peace treaty in 1739. But she accepted the terms and received a grant of land for her people.

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE
Maroon Governor of Haiti
1743-1803

In 1697, Spain ceded to France the western third of the island of Hispaniola. Called St. Domingue, it became the most profitable colony in the Americas, due to brutal exploitation of slave labor. In 1791, slaves in St. Domingue rose in rebellion, destroying plantations, and driving out the French. Spain and Britain took advantage of the situation to attack, and French tried to recover its colony.

Toussaint Louverture, a former slave, emerged as leader of the rebels. A brilliant military and political strategist, he defeated Spanish and British invasions, forced the French to abolish slavery and became Governor-General of St. Domingue. But he was captured and died in exile.

On January 1, 1804, St. Domingue declared its independence. The new nation took on the indigenous name for the island -- Haiti.

Tiger, Rabbit and the Festival

A story from Ecuador

Collected by Juan García Salazar
Translated by Chuck Kleymeyer

This is the story of Uncle Tiger and Nephew Rabbit.

Uncle Tiger and Nephew Rabbit lived out in the jungle. But seeing that between tiger and rabbit there is always a certain amount of rivalry, Rabbit lived a ways apart from Tiger.

There was a great festival approaching in the jungle, and during this festival all the animals had to get loads of food, because they had to go a whole week doing nothing but eating and inviting their friends for meals.

Rabbit had not been able to find any food for this festival. So one day, Rabbit said, "I'm going to go over to my Uncle Tiger's place, to see if he has any food. Maybe he'll give me a little bit. He always knows how to get ahold of some food."

So, off he went through the jungle—walk and walk, walk and walk. By and by he arrived at Tiger's house ...

"Uncle Tiger, Uncle ..."

"Who is it?"

"Me, Uncle. Your Nephew Rabbit."

"I don't have any nephew that's a rabbit ..."

"Aye, Uncle! What's the matter? I only came to say hello, Uncle. To see how you're doing."

Tiger didn't even open the door of his house. He just got up close to a hole that he had there for a window, and he said to Rabbit, "Alright, what do you want, Nephew?"

"Aye, Uncle. I just wanted to say hello, and ... also to ask you if you have food for the festival, because I don't have any and I wanted to ..."

"No, I don't have a thing yet. But I already know how I'm going to get my food, and I can't say anything to anybody."

"Aye, Uncle, tell me how I can get just a little bit for myself for the festival ..."

"I already said I don't know anything, and I'm not saying anything to anybody."

So Rabbit, seeing that Tiger wasn't saying anything, well he went on home. But from that day on, every single day, starting real early in the morning, Rabbit watched Tiger's every move: wherever he went, there was Rabbit spying on him and on everything he did.

So, it went on like that for several days, until one fine day very early in the morning Rabbit saw that Tiger left his house with a great big basket on his back, and set off down the path towards town. Walk and walk, walk and walk, walk and walk.

Rabbit, when he saw him, he said, "Aha!" There goes my uncle with a basket. I'm sure he's going for food. I'm going to follow him to see what he does."

And he took off behind Tiger, walk, and walk, and walk. Tiger, he went on to town. And about two miles from town, Rabbit found a nice pretty spot under a tree, and he lay down right there and took a nap.

About three hours later, here came Uncle Tiger back down the path with a basket full of all kinds of food: rice, sugar, fish, you name it.

Rabbit, as soon as he saw him, he got up from where he was napping and he watched him carefully. "Aha! there goes my Uncle Tiger, loaded down with food. That's the food I need for the festival."

As soon as Tiger went past, Rabbit cut way out through the jungle, so as to get in front of Tiger, and right there in the middle of the path—wah!—he lay down dead.

Tiger came up with the huge basket—oof, oof—when all of a sudden: "Hah! Huh! A dead rabbit in the path!!"

He came closer. He stared at it. "It looks dead. It's not moving. It's dead!"

Right away, he put the basket down on the ground, he got up real close to Rabbit, and he looked at him carefully. "Maybe it's not dead!" Wap! He gave it a little kick. But Rabbit—wah—dead.

Then Tiger picked up Rabbit by the ears and smelled him. "Dead. It's not rotten, must be dead just a little while. And how I do like rabbits! But I already have a full basket of food! Oh, no, no—what do I need more food for? What a shame. I'm gonna leave it. But what a shame—food is food."

He grabbed the basket and put it on his back, and he took off down the path; walk, and walk, and walk, and walk.

At that, Rabbit—poff—he got up and—shhhhhhhhuuuuuuuu—he cut way out through the jungle to get in front of Tiger, and right in the middle of the path where Tiger was going to come by—wah!—he lay down dead.

Here comes Tiger—oof, oof—when all of a sudden, "Hah! Another rabbit that looks dead!" He went closer. He stared at it. Wap! He gave it a little kick. But Rabbit—wah—dead.

Tiger put his basket down on the ground. He picked up Rabbit by the ears and smelled him. He shook him, and he tossed him on the ground—flah!—dead.

"Wow! What's going on round here? The rabbits are dying. One back there. Another one here. What's happening to the rabbits? Must be some sort of a plague.

"Wow, as much as I like rabbits, but I have a heck of a lot of food here. What a shame. But no, I'm not going to take it with me." And he put the basket back on his back and took off down the path: walk, and walk, and walk.

Well, immediately, Rabbit—poff—he jumped up, and he took off way out through the jungle, and in the middle of the road where Tiger would have to come past—wah!—he lay down dead.

And here comes Tiger—oof, oof—when all of a sudden, "Hah! Another dead rabbit. What's happening with all the rabbits? There must be some kind of rabbit fever going on. Oh no! And the way I like rabbits!"

He put his basket down on the ground. He picked up Rabbit by the ears. He shook him. He smelled him. He threw him on the ground—flah!—dead.

Wow! One dead rabbit. Two dead rabbits. Three dead rabbits! They're dropping dead all over the place. What am I going to hunt, if they all die?

"Geez, usually rabbits are very difficult to hunt, but the way it looks now, there's nothing to do but pick them up. The whole jungle must be full of dead rabbits. All I'd have to do is carry them home and store them for later. I can smoke them, put them in salt, and dry the meat. That way I can store them.

"Imagine. Three rabbits. Now that's food. No, no—I can't pass this up! I've gotta pick up all three of them: one here; one back there; and way back there, another one."

With that, Tiger picked up the dead rabbit and put it on top of his basket of food, and he went back for the other rabbits he had left back down the path: walk, and walk, and walk, and walk, and walk ...

"Hmm, seems like it was here that there was a dead rabbit... well, maybe a little bit further down."

Tiger kept on walking: walk, and walk, and walk, and walk.

"Hmm... I'm sure that it was here where there was a dead rabbit. Maybe down there a piece. Yeah, maybe just a little bit further down." And he kept on walking: walk, and walk, and walk, and walk.

"I'm sure it was right around. I know I was here. Wow. Hmm. Maybe further down! No?"

Walk, and walk, and walk, and walk ... walk, and walk ... and walk.

All of a sudden, he was almost to town, and no rabbits.

"Oh! Ah-aw. Rabbit! My food!!"

SSSSSSSSSUUUUUUSH—Tiger took off running back down the path.

By then there was no basket!! No Rabbit!!!

Tigre, Conejo y la Fiesta

Un cuento del Ecuador

Coleccionado por Juan García Salazar

Esto es el cuento del Tío Tigre y Sobrino Conejo.

Tío Tigre y Sobrino Conejo vivian en la montaña, pero como entre tigre y conejo siempre hay una cierta rivalidad, el conejo vivía un poco alejado del Tigre.

Venía una gran fiesta en la selva, y durante esa fiesta todos los animales tienen que buscar mucha comida porque hay que pasar toda una semana solamente comiendo e invitando a los amigos a comer.

El Conejo no habia podido conseguir nada de comida para esta fiesta. Un dia Conejo dijo, "Voy a ir donde mi Tío Tigre, para ver si tiene comida. Tal vez me da un poquito. El siempre sabe como conseguir comida."

Entonces, se fue por la selva—camina y andar, camina y andar. Ya llegó a la casa del Tigre ...

"Tío Tigre, Tío ..."

"¿Quién es?"

"Yo, Tío, su Sobrino Conejo."

"Yo no tengo ningún sobrino que sea conejo..."

¡Ay, Tío! ¿Qué pasa? Solo vengo a saludarlo, Tío. Para ver como está."

El Tigre ni siquiera abrió la puerta de la casa, sino que por un hueco que tenía como ventana se asomó y le dijo al conejo, "Bueno, ¿que quiere, Sobrino?"

"Ay, Tío. Yo solo quería saludarlo, y ... también preguntarle si usted tiene comida para la fiesta, porque yo no tengo y quería ..."

"No, yo no tengo nada todavía. Pero yo ya sé como voy a conseguir mi comida, y no le puedo decir nada a nadie."

"Ay, Tío, dígame como yo puedo conseguir un poquito para pasar mi fiesta ..."

"Ya dije que no sé nada, y no voy a decir nada a nadie."

Bueno, el Conejo, al ver que Tigre no le decia nada, se fue para su casa. Pero apartir de ese día, todos los dias desde muy temprano en la mañana, conejo miraba todo lo que el Tigre hacía: donde él iba, allí lo estaba espiando y así todo lo que hacía.

Bueno, así pasaron varios dias, hasta que un buen día muy temprano en la mañana el Conejo vió que Tigre salió de la casa con un gran canasto puesto en la espalda, tomó el camino, y se fué al pueblo. Camina y andar, camina y andar, camina y andar.

Conejo, cuando lo vió, dijo, "¡Aja! Allí va mi tío con un canasto. Seguro que se va a buscar la comida. Voy a seguirlo par ver que hace."

Y se fué detrás del tigre, camina, camina, camina. El Tigre se fué al pueblo. Y faltando unos tres kilómetros para llegar al pueblo, el Conejo buscó un arbol bien bonito y se acostó a dormir alli.

Después de como tres horas, ya venía el Tigre de regreso con el canasto lleno de todo tipo de comida: arroz, azucar, pescado, de todo.

El Conejo, cuando ya lo vió, se levantó de donde estaba durmiendo y se puso a mirarlo. "¡Aja!" Allí va mi Tío Tigre, cargado de comida. Esa es la comida que yo necesito para la fiesta".

Cuando Tigre pasó, Conejo dió una gran vuelta por la selva, para adelantarse al Tigre, y en la mitad del camino, ¡juuas! se acostó, muerto.

El Tigre venía con el gran canasto—huh, huh—cuando de pronto, "¡HAH! ¡HUH! Un conejo muerto en el camino!!!"

Se acercó. Lo miró. "Parece muerto. No se mueve. ¡Está muerto!

Enseguida puso el canasto en el suelo, se acercó donde el Conejo, lo miró bien. "¡Tal vez no está muerto!" ¡Paat!—le da una patada. El Conejo—guaas—muerto.

Entonces el Tigre lo cojió de las orejas y lo olió.

"Muerto. No está podrido. Recién está muerto. ¡Con lo que me gustan los conejos! Pero, ya tengo un canasto lleno de comida! Oh, no, no—más comida para qué? Que pena. Yo lo dejo. Pero que pena, comida es comida."

Cogió el canasto y lo puso en la espalda y siguió. Camina, camina, camina, camina.

Con eso, el Conejo—¡piit!—se levantó y—shhhhhhhhuuuu—dió una gran vuelta por la selva, y en la mitad del camino por donde tenia que pasar el Tigre—juuas—se acostó muerto.

Tigre venía—huh, huh—cuando de pronto, "¡Jah! otro conejo que parece muerto!" Se acercó, lo miró—¡paat!—le dió una patada. Conejo—guaas—muerto.

Tigre puso el canasto en el suelo. Lo cojió al Conejo de las orejas, y lo olió. Lo sacudió y lo tiró al piso—¡plass!—muerto.

"¡Caramba! ¿Qué está pasando? Los conejos se están muriendo. Allá uno. Aquí otro. ¿Que pasará con los conejos? ¡Probablemente una peste!

"Caramba, tanto que me gustan los conejos, pero aquí tengo mucha comida. Que pena. Pero no, no lo voy a llevar." Y puso el canasto en la espalda y siguió su camino—camina, camina, camina.

Bueno, enseguida, Conejo—¡piit!—se levanto y dió una gran vuelta por la selva, y en la mitad del camino por donde tenía que pasar el Tigre—¡juaas!—se acostó, muerto.

El Tigre venía—huh, huh—cuando de pronto, "¡Jaa! Otro conejo muerto. ¿Qué está pasando con los conejos? Seguramente hay una peste de conejos. ¡Oh, no! Con lo que me gustan los conejos."

Puso el canasto en el suelo, cojió al Conejo por las orejas, lo sacudió, lo olió, lo tiró al piso—¡plaas!—muerto.

"¡Caramba! Un conejo muerto. Dos conejos muertos. Tres conejos muertos. Están muriéndose por cantidades. ¿Qué voy a cazar yo si todos se mueren?

"Chuta, normalmente los conejos son muy dificiles de cazar, pero aquí están que no hay que hacer nada sino solo recogerlos. Seguramente la selva está llena de conejos muertos, solo tendria que llevarlos y guardarlos para otro día. Puedo ahumarlos, ponerlos en sal, y secar la carne. Guardarla.

"Imaginase. Tres conejos. Eso ya es comida. ¡No, no! Yo voy a recojerlos a los tres—aquí uno, allá otro, más allá otro."

Enseguida Tigre cojió al conejo muerto y lo puso encima de la comida, y fué a recojer los conejos que había dejado atrás. Camina, camina, camina, camina, camina ...

"Jum—parece que era aquí que estaba el conejo muerto... Bueno, tal vez un poco más allá."

Siguió caminando—camina, camina, camina, camina.

"Juum ...estoy seguro que aquí es que estaba muerto el conejo. Tal vez más allá. Si, tal vez un poquito más allá todavía."

Siguió caminando—camina, camina, camina, camina.

"Estoy seguro que era por acá. Yo estuve aquí! Caramba. ¡Jum! Tal vez más allá! No?"

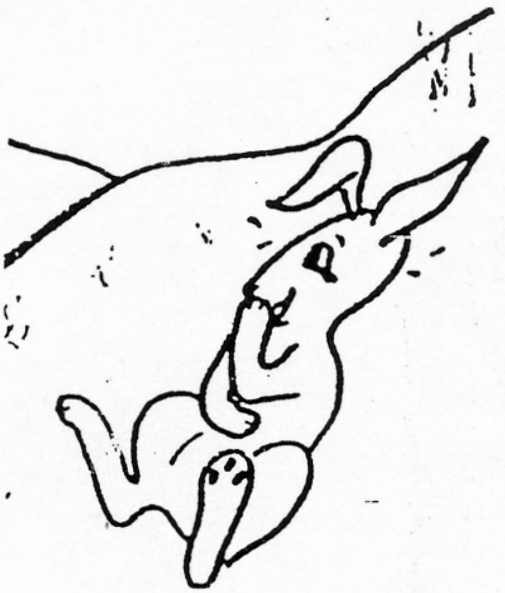
Camina, camina, camina, camina ... camina, camina ... camina.

De pronto, ya estaba cerca del pueblo, y nada de conejos.

"¡Oh! Ah, ah. ¡Conejo!!! ¡Mi comida!"

SSSSSSSSSSSSUSH—el Tigre se regresó corriendo.

¡Ya no había canasto! ¡Ni conejo!!!



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• Juan García Salazar