



BLACK VENEZUELANAS

Fighting for freedom,
preserving African heritage

Black History 101

evidence • over • myths

AFRICANS IN VENEZUELA



Beginning in the early 1500s, enslaved Africans were brought to present-day Venezuela and forced to work in mining and agriculture. In Barlovento, their labor supported cacao plantations. However, Africans also brought agricultural knowledge, spiritual practices, and cultural traditions that their descendants continued to develop.





MIGUEL AND GUIOMAR

In the early 1550s, an enslaved man named Miguel escaped the Buría mining region and helped establish a community of African and Indigenous fugitives. He became king, and his wife, Guiomar, became queen. The community organized its own leadership and defenses, challenging Spanish control over their lives. Spanish forces eventually destroyed the settlement and killed Miguel.

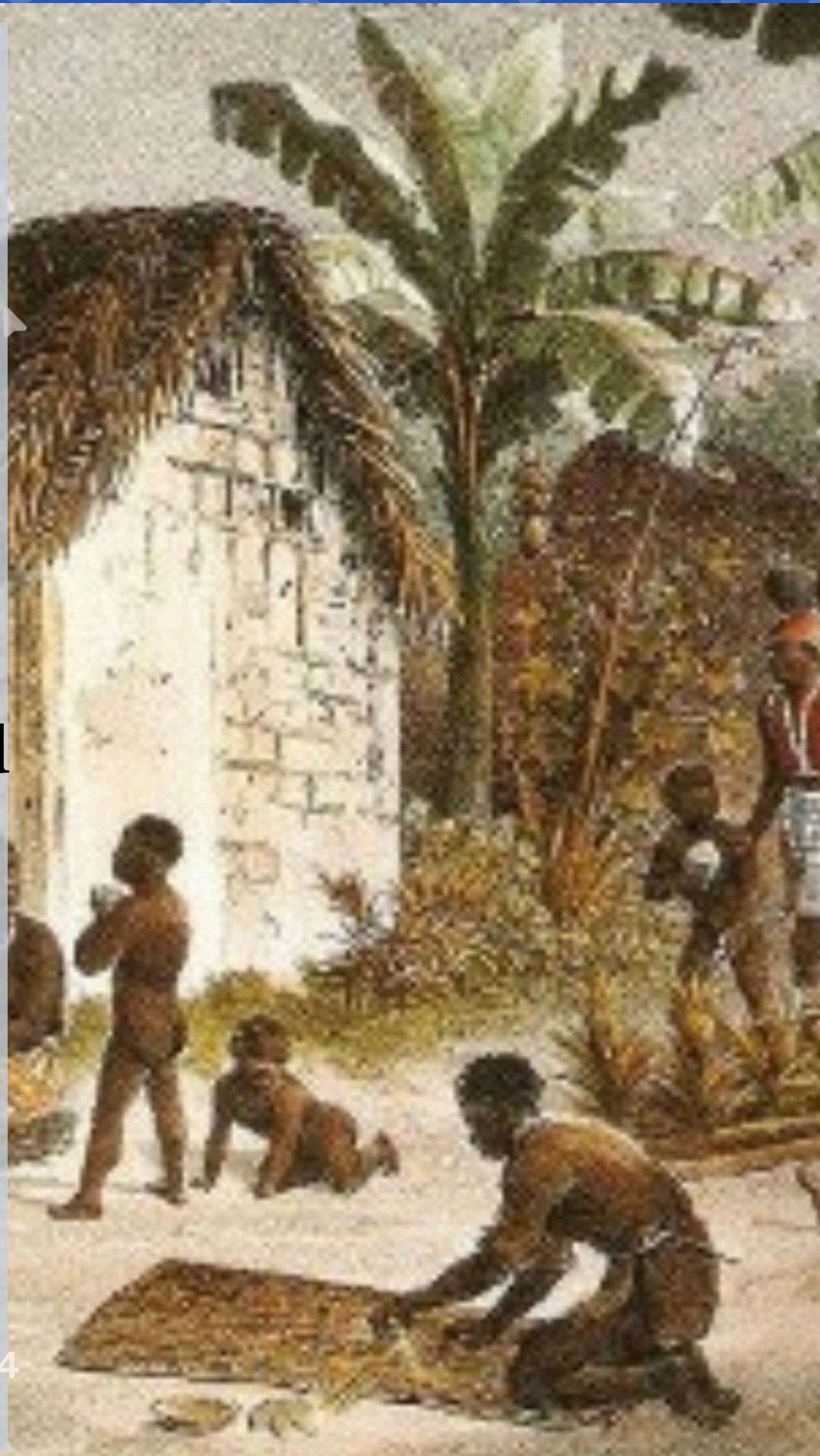


King Miguel I de Buría



BUILDING COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE SLAVERY

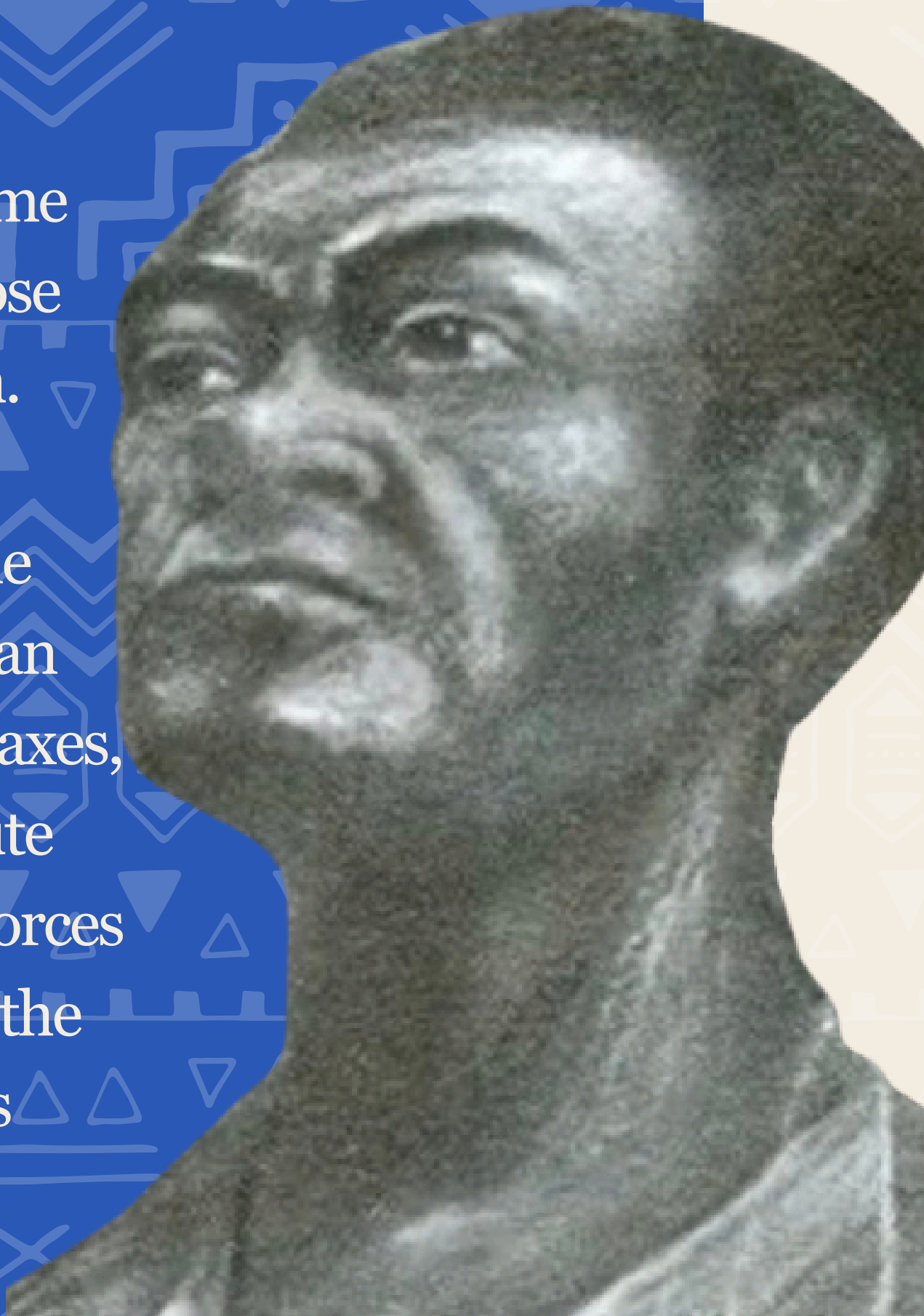
Miguel's settlement was part of a broader history of escape. Throughout Venezuela, people fleeing slavery established communities known as cumbes. Knowledge of farming, water sources, and the surrounding land helped sustain these settlements. In Barlovento, some communities remained inhabited by descendants generations later.





THE CORO REBELLION

On May 10, 1795, approximately 400 enslaved people, free Black people, and some Indigenous people rose up in the Coro region. Associated with José Leonardo Chirino, the rebellion demanded an end to slavery, sales taxes, and Indigenous tribute payments. Colonial forces violently suppressed the uprising. Chirino was later captured and executed in 1796.

A large, high-contrast, black and white portrait of José Leonardo Chirino. He is a Black man with a beard and mustache, looking slightly to the left. The portrait is positioned on the right side of the image, partially overlapping the blue background.

José Leonardo Chirino

WHO RECORDED THEIR RESISTANCE?

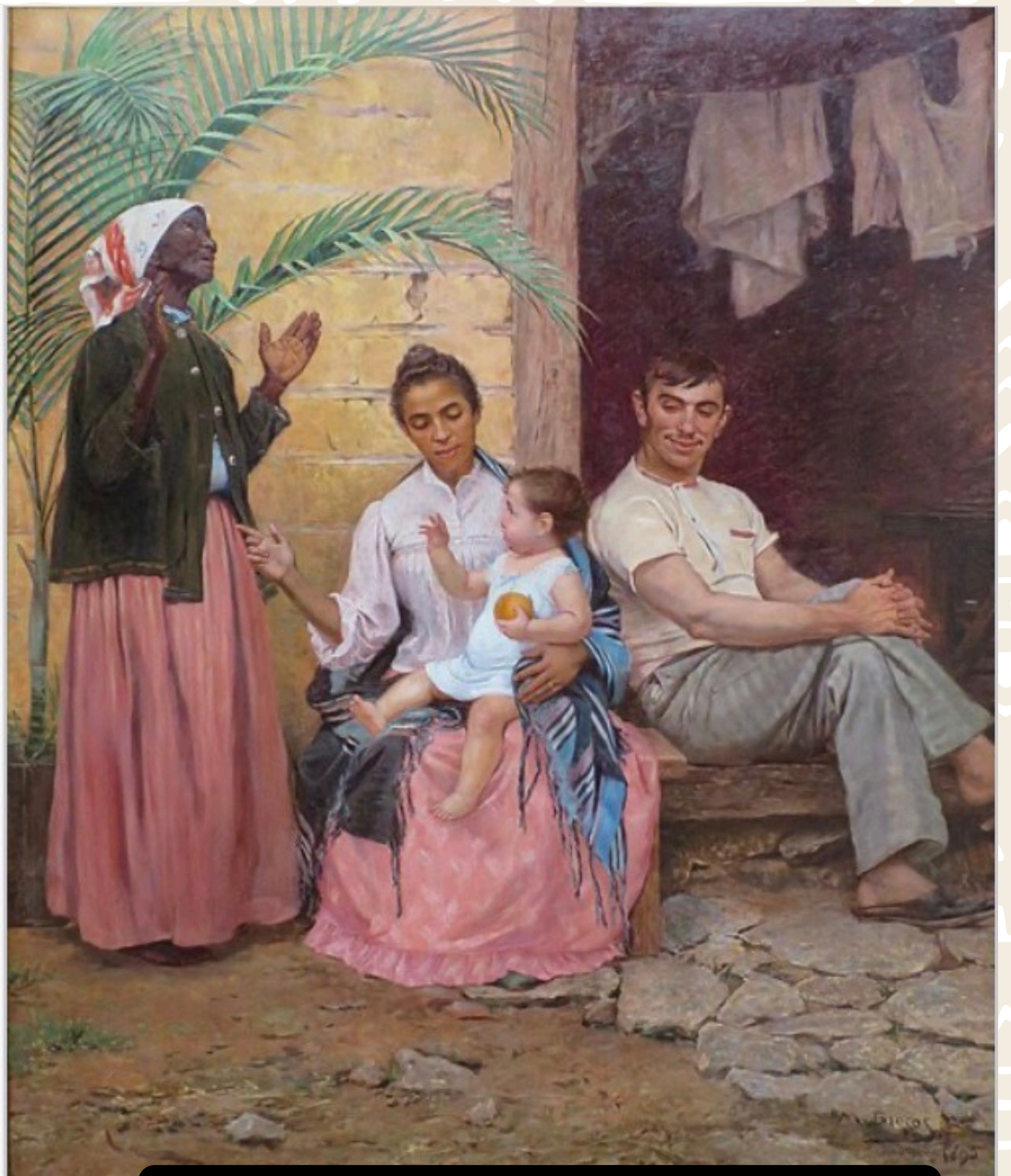
Much of what survives about the Coro rebellion comes from the authorities who suppressed it. Officials described the rebels' demands and justified their punishment, while the records examined by historians contain no testimony from the rebels themselves. This limits what we can confidently say about their intentions, particularly claims that they sought to reproduce the Haitian Revolution.





ABOLITION DID NOT END EXCLUSION

Slavery was abolished in Venezuela in 1854, but freedom did not remove racial barriers. Political leaders later promoted European immigration as a means of “whitening” the population. Meanwhile, claims that Venezuelans were all racially mixed could make discrimination harder to acknowledge, even as Black communities continued to experience exclusion.



Modesto Brocos, *A Redenção de Cam* (The Redemption of Ham), 1895. Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

PRESERVING AFRICAN TRADITIONS

In Barlovento, African traditions continued through drumming, dance, language, and spiritual practices. For instance, San Juan celebrations combined Catholic devotion with African cultural practices. Historian Walton Messi explains that these traditions sustained community identity and served as forms of resistance.



DEMANDING RECOGNITION

Black Venezuelans also organized to challenge their exclusion from the national story. Cultural associations preserved the memory of Chirino through commemorations, music, and monuments. Their work shows that recognition did not happen automatically. Communities actively insisted that Black resistance and experience belonged in Venezuela's history.



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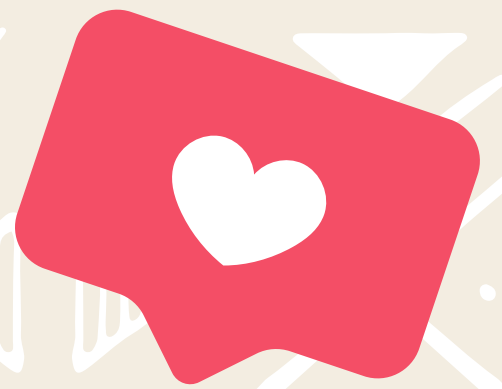
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