

## **WELCOME**

### **To the African Diaspora in the Americas Collection Study Guide**

#### **How to use this study guide**

This study guide is intended as a resource for undergraduate professors as well as for community organizations planning to screen the documentaries of the Latin American Video Archives' African Diaspora in the Americas Collection. The videos included in this collection depict the histories, political struggles, and everyday life of the black people of Latin America, and this study guide aims to help educators present and discuss these important videos with classes in both academic and community settings.

The introduction is a brief overview of the history and present circumstances of people of African descent in the Americas. Given the variety of experiences Afro-Latin people in different countries have had, it is a very general discussion that gives a broad historical account and discusses some of the issues and perspectives which may enrich the themes covered in the videos and help provide the educator with specific topics use in the organization of the class.

Another valuable resource for educators is the bibliography, which can be used to create a course reading packet. This bibliography is a general, selected survey of a growing literature on black peoples in Latin America, limited to sources in English and in-print, and is a good starting point for educators looking for written materials. The bibliography contains both scholarly and more popular texts, as well as some web-based readings for courses that plan to utilize the internet. The bibliography is divided into three sections: 1) a section with materials on the African diaspora in Latin America in general, 2) a list of some relevant web sites, and 3) a section organized by the countries treated in the videos. The description of each documentary in the collection also contains a brief bibliography of two or three texts related to the video's particular subject and recommended for use with that documentary. Educators with an interest in countries not discussed in the collection's documentaries are urged to consult the books in the general bibliography, particularly the collection by the Minority Rights Group, which contains detailed chapters on a number of countries, Leslie Rout's book, which contains an excellent bibliography, and Whitten and Torres' edited volume.

The videos are divided into four thematic modules, which have a specific theme and associated videos: "[Histories of Resistance/Cultures of Resistance](#)," "[Religion](#)," "[Arts and Culture](#)," "[Movement, Migration, and Memory](#)." These modules are designed to help the educator present particular issues to the class and to generate discussion about the subjects addressed by the documentaries. Each module has a brief introduction that discusses the relevance of the issue, followed by some key terms. These terms provide a common vocabulary for students to use in class discussion. The modules also feature questions for study and discussion, which are designed for discussion before and after viewing the documentaries in the module. The "before viewing" questions should help the students focus on the particular themes and issues of each module, while the "after viewing" questions will help students integrate their viewing experience into a broader conceptual framework. Although the questions and key terms are geared to the module as a whole, we recommend that the educator watch the videos or read their descriptions before assigning the "before viewing" questions, as some videos may address certain questions more effectively than others.

Finally, there are the video descriptions themselves. These feature a brief overview of the documentary and some of the issues it addresses, followed by a brief bibliography of texts related to the subjects covered in each documentary. The educator can use these texts in conjunction with the video.

## **Introduction**

The long and complex history of Africans and their descendants in Latin America is poorly understood in North America and even in Latin America itself. There are a number of reasons why their important story is becoming more closely studied in the United States. Afro-Latin immigrants, particularly from the Caribbean, and their U.S.-born children, are becoming an increasingly noticeable population throughout the country. Although Afro-Latinos have been settling here in numbers since the early twentieth century, their growing numbers and geographic expansion into new areas is calling into question the ways in which race and ethnicity are understood in North America. The increasing importance of Hispanics as a demographic group in the United States has led to attempts by educators, advertisers, and politicians, among others, to understand the Latino community, including Afro-Latinos. Furthermore, the rise of black liberation movements throughout the Americas has focused more attention on the historical and cultural similarities between black populations in the various countries of the Caribbean and North, Central, and South America.

Somewhere between 12 and 15 million enslaved Africans were brought to the Western Hemisphere. These Africans brought with them to the Americas their knowledge of skills like farming and crafts, as well as their religious and artistic practices. Along with the native people of the Americas, theirs was the labor that built the colonies and modern nations of the Western Hemisphere and that provided Europe with important goods such as cotton, sugar, and tobacco, setting the foundations of the world economy. Although many of the enslaved Africans arrived in North America, far more ended up in the Latin American colonies of the Spanish and Portuguese. Some estimates suggest that the British colonies in North America (the future United States) received only 5% of the Africans brought to the Western Hemisphere, while Brazil alone received 46%. The descendants of these enslaved people continue to live throughout the Americas to this day. In many countries in the Americas, black people fought on both sides in the wars of independence from Spain in exchange for promises of emancipation that were only gradually granted. After the end of slavery, black people throughout the region eventually found themselves "free citizens" in new nations that nonetheless viewed them as an obstacle to national progress, invisibilizing them and/or cloaking racism in myths about "racial democracy" in nations like Brazil and Colombia when they could not reduce their numbers drastically, as was the case in Argentina.

The similarities between U.S. African-Americans and Afro-Latinos include the common experiences of slavery and marginalization. There are other commonalities as well, including the importance of religious life and expressive culture such as music, as well as comparable – but not identical – processes of social and economic exclusion. Furthermore, in the United States, African-Americans and Afro-Latinos have often shared neighborhoods in many cities as well as occupied a similar socioeconomic status as workers in the urban industrial and service sectors. These shared spaces are the result of labor migrations, in which both Afro-Latin Americans and African-Americans from the southern United States moved to the cities of the North such as New York in search of work. It is through a similar search for economic opportunity that English-speaking black West Indians from countries like Jamaica ended up migrating to Latin American countries such as Cuba and Costa Rica, and black people from Africa and the Atlantic islands of Cape Verde migrated to Argentina.

On the other hand, the historical experience of Afro-Latin Americans has been marked in many ways by different dynamics than that of black people in the United States. These differences are part of the distinct history of Afro-Latin Americans, both during and after slavery, and have led to some issues that are specific to Latin America, although they may resonate with the black experience in the United States on some level. Spanish and Portuguese slavery was as cruel and brutal as slavery in North America, and lasted even longer, ending as late as 1886 in Cuba and 1888 in Brazil. However, the system was different in significant ways. While North American slaveholders managed for the most part to maintain social distance between white and black people, the Spanish and Portuguese were far less able to keep white, black, and native peoples

in separate niches. A major hindrance was the amount of race mixture between the three groups, which the authorities tried, unsuccessfully, to manage by classifying mixed-race people into hierarchical orders.

One of the most crucial results of this difference is that race in Latin America is far more fluid and less well-defined than in North America. In the United States, most people are seen as either black or white, with a thick line separating the two categories. In Latin America, however, race tends to be more of a spectrum, with some people being seen as more or less black or white. This fluidity of race, which contrasts sharply with the binary concept of race prevalent in the United States, is a product of the history of Latin America, where the significant number of free black people, even during the time of slavery, confounded attempts to universally equate blackness with slavery. Not only did some people manage to buy their freedom or be freed by their masters, but some of the *conquistadors* themselves, such as Juan Garrido, who accompanied Cortés in the conquest of Mexico, were actually the descendants of the Christianized Africans who had lived in Spain since the end of the fourteenth century. Even more widespread was the acceptance of some of the illegitimate children of slaveowners and enslaved women into white society as mixed-race people, instead of being labeled black and consigned to slavery, as in the United States. The status of mixed-race people and the rights they would be allowed in mainstream society were constantly in debate, and so preoccupied the colonial government that it made various attempts to classify and control people of different racial mixtures. Race in Latin America continues to be dependent not only on genealogy and physical appearance but also on other factors as well – whether a person is light-skinned, rich, or “acts white” can actually make him or her be regarded as closer to white.

This fluidity of race has meant that some Afro-Latin Americans have had possibilities for social advancement through the process of “whitening,” by which they abandon black culture and accept European values – a denial and negation of blackness that is often accompanied by the seeking out of lighter-skinned marriage partners so as to remove what is seen as the “stain” of blackness from future generations, allowing them the possibility of advancing even further up the racial hierarchy. While “whitening” allows some individuals to advance, they must accept negative stereotypes about blackness and reinforce them by their own example. These stereotypes have real effects, and it is no coincidence that black Latin Americans tend to be over-represented in the lowest rungs of the employment ladder, living in the most underserved and frequently dangerous areas, and with the lowest levels of education and medical coverage in their countries. The same whitening process that holds out the promise of advancement for a lucky few and allows for many Latin American countries to imagine themselves as “racial democracies” nevertheless perpetuates the denigration and marginalization of the majority of black people.

Black peoples have not accepted passively this situation of marginalization. In a variety of ways, they have long tried to better their situation. Their means of resisting domination have tended to fall on a spectrum between rebellion and group struggle, on the one hand, and the creative subversion of the system for individual benefit, on the other. Thus, in both Florida and colonial Mexico we see cases in which cimarrones (runaways) fled the mines and plantations to found palenques, their own communities outside the reach of Spanish law. These efforts were sometimes successful, but were just as often brutally crushed by the authorities. On the other hand, many slaves freed themselves by buying their freedom, or by having relations with the slavemasters that promised freedom and upward mobility for their mixed-race children. More commonly, Afro-Latin resistance combined tactics that were both insurgent and worked within the system. They frequently cloaked rebellion in what from the outside may have appeared to be acceptance. Black Latin Americans found hidden loopholes within the system of racial domination that they were able to exploit for their own ends. For example, in the Candomblé and Lucumí religions of Brazil and Cuba, slaves were able to hide their own gods within the Catholic saints they were forced by the slaveowners to accept. While appearing to be faithful Catholics, they were in fact refusing to let slavery erase their religious beliefs. Similarly, Afro-Latin Americans were able to find in the arts, especially music and dance, a way to forge community bonds; express their creativity, humanity, and spirituality; and even mock the pompousness of the whites

– often right under the noses of the white elite. In the face of brutal slavery and social marginalization that threatened to rob them of their humanity, Afro-Latin Americans used and continue to use these forms of resistance to maintain their cultural identity.

These kinds of cultural resistance have tended to involve a measure of syncretism, by which different African practices merged through the association of different African peoples in the common situation of slavery, and blended with the European-derived culture that characterized life in Latin America. This kind of mixing allowed for black Latin Americans to live in ways that both preserved their identity and allowed them to survive in the New World. This blending, perhaps the most distinctive feature of Latin American societies, is also present in the black political movements that have sprung up throughout the Americas in the past 40 years or so, as black people struggle both to assert their cultural difference from their non-black fellow citizens and to demand inclusion in their national societies and economies.

Black life in Latin America is characterized by these delicate balances between rebellion and accommodation, between assimilation and preservation, that date back to the earliest appearance of black people in the region. Afro-Latin Americans have survived the traumas of slavery and marginalization to continue to fight for their social, economic, and human rights; to make themselves visible in nations that would push them into the margins; and to fight for the acknowledgement of the vital contributions they have made through the centuries to the cultural, political, and social landscapes of the nations of Latin America. The documentaries presented in the African Diaspora in the Americas Collection document these subtle negotiations of meaning for a people who are finally beginning to make themselves understood on their own terms.

### **Notes**

1) I use the term “Afro-Latino” to describe people of African descent with roots in Latin America residing in the United States. By “Afro-Latin Americans,” I mean people of African descent residing in Latin America. “Afro-Latin” is a descriptive term which refers to something pertaining to Afro-Latinos and Afro-Latin Americans alike.

## **Module #1: Histories of Resistance/Cultures of Resistance**

The history of Africans and their descendants in Latin America begins with the atrocities of the slave ships and forced labor in the mines, plantations, and elite homes of Latin America. Still, it is important to realize that black people were not passive victims. Indeed, the story of Afro-Latin America is a story of resistance and struggle against slavery and domination, which manifested itself during times of slavery in slave rebellions and the founding of runaway slave communities. Alongside these rebellions, some resisted the dehumanization of slavery, poverty, and marginalization through certain kinds of expressive culture that helped them retain their sense of their own humanity. Still others were able to integrate themselves into mainstream society, process that continue to the present day.

Despite the importance of the black experience in Latin America, it is a story that has rarely been told in official chronicles or history textbooks. But it continues to be recounted in the everyday practices of the Afro-Latin American people, whose expressive culture, language, legends, cooking, and lifeways make reference to their African origins and their means of surviving centuries of enslavement, discrimination, and marginalization. This emphasis on the past is an essential part of the resistance of African peoples – a refusal to forget who they are and the history they have lived. Even the political struggles of today involve the recounting of history in order to claim their rights and their identity in a world that has too often forgotten and denied them.

The videos in this section discuss the experiences of black Latin Americans, highlighting not only the suffering and indignities of slavery and discrimination, but also the ways in which Afro-Latin Americans have struggled to understand and represent their history as a people in Latin America.

### **Key Terms**

*Expressive culture* – music, dance, storytelling, and other arts by which a people expresses itself.  
*Cimarrón* – the runaway slaves who escaped to found their own mini-societies in the palenques (see below.)

*Invisibility* – the idea that a minority group in society is not thought of as a culture, or in some cases even as a people.

*Marginalization* – related to invisibility, in that it refers to a group being pushed to the margins of society. Marginalization also involves a minority group's being neglected and denied social rights or economic equality.

*Palenque* – self-sufficient black communities founded by fugitive slaves that retained their own cultural identity. Also known in different areas as “quilombos,” “mocambos,” and “cumbes.”

*Resistance* – struggle against enslavement and aggression, as well as invisibility and marginalization.

### **Discussion and Study Questions**

*Before viewing:*

1. What do you know about the history of Latin America? What do you know about the history of black people in Latin America?
2. Why do you think the history of black people in Latin America has been so seldom told and so poorly understood?
3. Why is it important to tell this history now?
4. How do you know stories about your family? Are these stories a kind of history? Is history only valid if it appears in history books?
5. How is culture a form of resistance? How is the retelling of history a form of resistance? How do these forms of resistance relate to political struggle?

*After viewing:*

1. How has the history of black people in Latin America been made invisible? Why?

2. What were some of the ways in which people resisted slavery? What are some kinds of resistance after slavery and in the present day? What are some similarities and differences between them?
3. How have Afro-Latin Americans used culture to resist slavery, invisibility, and discrimination? Give examples.
4. Why are telling stories and recounting the past so important for the people depicted in the videos?
4. Why is the history of black people in Latin America important for Latin America in general? How is it similar or different from the history of black people in North America?

**Videos**

[\*Afroargentines\*](#)

[\*The Forgotten Roots\*](#)

[\*From Florida to Coahuila\*](#)

[\*The Scorpion\*](#)

[\*The Promised Ship\*](#)

[\*Never Again\*](#)

[\*Calabazos del Sol\*](#)

## **Module #2: Religion**

The Africans who were brought to the Americas were stripped of their land, their possessions, and their freedom. However, they carried with them a very important resource that helped them survive the suffering of slavery and the trauma of being uprooted from their homes: their religious traditions. These faiths were incredibly rich and varied, as diverse as the African nations where the slaves had come from. The religions of the Yoruba people of present-day Nigeria, the Efik and Ijo of Nigeria's Calabar region, and some of the Bantu-speaking peoples of central Africa – today the two Congos, Gabon, Cameroon, Angola, and the Central African Republic – all provided the roots for the Afro-Latin American religions found in countries like Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil. These new forms of the old African faiths are the products of years of cross-fertilization and mutual influence between the Africans of various nationalities who found themselves in the common situation of slavery, and with the Catholic religion of their new homes.

The survival of these religions is an amazing feat of cultural and spiritual resilience. Although the slavemasters tried to force Africans and their descendants to reject their old divinities in favor of Catholicism, Christianity merely provided new divinities in the form of saints, who provided a convenient way for Afro-Latin Americans to disguise their own deities in Catholic worship. It was their unshakeable faith, and the help of their gods, that gave black people in Latin America the strength to survive and persist through all the struggles of slavery and racism.

The documentaries in this module present the history of African religions in Latin America, their intermingling with Catholicism and with each other, and the ways that the faithful communicate with their gods.

### **Key Terms**

*Abakuá* – a religion centered on religious brotherhoods, which prescribes a moral code for men. It originated among the Efik and Ijo people of a region in southeastern Nigeria called Calabar.

*Bantu* – a major African language family. A variety of ethnic groups spread throughout southern, central, and eastern Africa speak Bantu languages. In Cuba, some Bantu peoples and traditions are called “Congo.”

*Candomblé* – an Afro-Brazilian religion with roots in Yoruba tradition, centered on the worship of the orishas.

*Lucumí* – an Afro-Cuban religion with roots in Yoruba tradition, centered on the worship of the orishas. Also called “Santería” and “Regla de Ocha.”

*Orisha* – the deities of the Yoruba people. In Brazilian candomblé and Cuban lucumí, each orisha is associated with a particular Catholic saint. Also spelled “orixa” in Brazil.

*Palo Monte* – an Afro-Cuban religion with roots in the spiritual traditions of the Congo and Angola, centered on the worship of ancestors, spirits, and the divine essence. Also called “Mayombe.”

*Syncretism* – the way in which people with different cultural practices, such as religion, borrow elements from one another through their interactions over time. The Afro-Latin American religions, for example, were formed from the interactions between different African religious traditions and Catholicism, among others.

*Yoruba* – an ethnic group whose 10 million people live in the present-day nations of Nigeria and Benin.

### **Discussion and Study Questions**

*Before viewing:*

1. Are you or is someone you know religious? How does religious faith help people deal with difficult times in their lives?
2. Why do you think the European and Portuguese slavemasters tried so hard to eradicate African religious traditions in the New World?
3. Define the word “superstition.” Why do some people use that word to define other people's beliefs? What would you do if you were told your belief was superstitious, irrational, or wrong?
4. Why do many religions focus on ancestors and the forces of nature?

5. What relationship does the believer have with supernatural forces in different religions?

*After viewing:*

1. What are some of the similarities between the various religious traditions in Africa, Cuba and Brazil? What are some of the differences? Do any of them share features with African-American Christianity in the United States?
2. How were these religions able to survive for so long and through so much persecution?
3. How are these religions syncretic (see key terms)?
4. How is it possible to have more than one religion?
5. What is spiritual trance? How do explanations of trance by believers and by scientists differ? How are they similar? What are the ways of telling the future in Afro-Latin American religions? What is the role of spiritual trance and telling the future in these religions?
6. How do the religions of Afro-Latin America allow their believers to have contact with the spiritual realm?

### **Videos**

[\*Pierre Fatumbi Verger: Messenger between Two Worlds\*](#)

[\*Aché Moyuba Orisha\*](#)

[\*Caurí: The Word of the Saint\*](#)

[\*Nganga Kiyangala\*](#)



### **Module #3: Arts and Culture**

Some of the greatest contributions to world culture that black people in Latin America and around the world have made are in the fields of art and culture: music, literature, and the visual and performing arts. Many of these artistic contributions have become part of the national culture of countries in Latin America. Even in those places where Afro-Latin Americans have faced the most discrimination and prejudice, they have also helped to shape the cultural face of their nations.

Many of the cultural expressions of Afro-Latin Americans feature some kind of connection with the past, and ultimately with Africa. This connection reflects the importance of art in times of hardship, when enslaved black people used expressive culture to consolidate their communities, console their suffering, and keep themselves from spiritual death.

Despite this strong African component, none of the Afro-Latin arts has been developed without at least some influence from the cultures of the European and indigenous peoples with whom they have cohabitated in Latin America. This is reflected in the exciting and dynamic repertoire of expressive practices shown in the documentaries of this module. In many, African-rooted arts are only practiced by the black population. In others, they have become appropriated by mainstream national culture as well. In still others, techniques of European “high art” such as painting have incorporated black cultural elements, especially when practiced by black artists. These documentaries demonstrate the wide spectrum of the artistic and cultural practices of Afro-Latin Americans, ranging from those that retain the most African influence, to those that have been synthesized with the other cultural streams of Latin America.

#### **Key Terms**

*Appropriation* – the deliberate adoption of a cultural form that was created by one group of people, often an ethnic minority, by another group, often in the national mainstream. Sometimes this appropriation happens without full recognition of the people who created the art in question.

*Cultural preservation* – the ways in which a group works to hold on to traditional forms of expressive culture in changing times.

*Syncretism* – the way in which people with different cultural practices borrow elements from one another through their interactions over time. For example, much music in Latin America mixes African, indigenous and Spanish or Portuguese melodies, rhythms, and performance and dance styles.

#### **Discussion and Study Questions**

*Before viewing:*

1. Can you think of some examples in which black art and cultural practices have been fused with the art and culture of non-black people?
2. In the United States and other countries, some of the most important cultural expressions have come from poor communities and people of color. Why and how have the people with the lowest position in society been accepted as producers of culture?
3. What is the difference between appropriation and syncretism? Why is the difference important for talking about Afro-Latin arts and culture?
4. Black arts in Latin America and the United States often involve some level of connection with the past. Why are such connections important?
5. Is it possible for an artistic or cultural practice to combine appropriation or syncretism with cultural preservation? How?

*After viewing:*

1. Which of the videos depict appropriation? Do these appropriations seem successful to you artistically as fusions?
2. Which videos depict syncretism? What are some of the non-African elements that have been incorporated through syncretism? How is syncretism different from appropriation?

3. Which videos depict cultural preservation? Do the syncretisms and appropriations of the videos also show some degree of cultural preservation?
4. Is it more important for black art to emphasize the African cultural roots of the past or to express the modern realities of mixed-race Latin America? Is a true fusion possible without losing the essence of either one?

**Videos**

[\*Jump Over the Atlantic\*](#)

[\*The Scorpion\*](#)

[\*Candombe\*](#)

[\*Ritual Rhythms: Candombe\*](#)

[\*Motivations\*](#)

[\*It Seems Like Happiness\*](#)

### **Module #4: Movement, Migration, and Memory**

In many ways, the story of the descendants of Africans in the Americas is a story of constant movement and migration. Since their forced passage from their African homelands to Latin America, Afro-Latin Americans have undertaken many migrations in their search for freedom, peace, and self-determination. In times of slavery, many of the enslaved escaped to establish their own communities. After emancipation, many black Latin Americans migrated throughout the Caribbean in search of work. And since the last century, the forces of history have brought Afro-Latin migrants to the urban centers of the United States, like the U.S. African-Americans who came from the rural South to the cities of the North.

The various movements shown in these documentaries took place in different times, through different places, and for a variety of reasons. But they do have their commonalities. An important part of all of these movements is the memory of the place left behind. Sometimes this memory is kept in the form of cultural practices. In other cases it is a struggle to return to the place a group of people was forced to leave. But all of the documentaries represent people engaged in an elaborate balancing act between adaptation to the new home and keeping a sense of identity based in another place.

#### **Key Terms**

*Assimilation* – the process by which cultural minorities adapt their practices to fit in with mainstream values and behaviors. This practice can be contrasted with cultural preservation (see below) and often takes place in conjunction with it.

*Cultural preservation* – the process by which cultural minorities retain distinctive behaviors and mores despite the pressure to assimilate to mainstream norms. See above.

*Diaspora* –the state of a group of people who are scattered from an original homeland throughout various areas. The African diaspora refers to the dispersion of black people in areas as far-flung as Britain and Brazil, Canada and Colombia.

*Migration* – the movement of a group of people from one area to another.

#### **Discussion and Study Questions**

##### *Before viewing*

1. Have you ever moved before? Why? How did it affect you?
2. What can be gained and lost when a group of people moves to a new environment?
3. Are there more similarities or more differences between black peoples living in different places? How do you imagine their migrations have affected them?
4. Which do you think is more important – assimilation to a new environment or preservation of an older identity? How can a balance be struck between the two?

##### *After viewing*

1. What are the reasons behind the various migrations depicted in the videos? Which of them were forced and which were voluntary? Is moving in order to find work forced or voluntary?
2. What are some of the connections you see between the old and new homes? What are the changes?
3. What are some of the ways in which black people have tried to preserve the memory of their prior homes? Have they been successful?
4. Why have some groups chosen to try to return to their prior homes rather than assimilating?
5. Has each of the groups depicted in the videos been able to achieve a balance between assimilation and cultural preservation? How and how not?

#### **Videos**

[Jump Over the Atlantic](#)

[Pierre Fatumbi Verger: Messenger between Two Worlds](#)

[From Florida to Coahuila](#)

[My Footsteps in Baraguá](#)

[\*The Promised Ship\*](#)

[\*Never Again\*](#)

[\*Afroargentines\*](#)

[\*Cuban Roots/Bronx Stories\*](#)

***Aché Moyuba Orisha***

dir. Cristina González Gallardo

Cuba, 1990, 42 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

It is through a blend of cultures ranging from European to African, and even dashes of Indian and Chinese, that Cuba has forged its unique and multi-faceted identity. The same is true of Cuba's diverse religious traditions: Catholicism, Santería, and Spiritism – among many others. This engrossing documentary shows the intricate hybrids, such as Santería, that have evolved through the fusion of African and European faiths, and the continued ties between the Catholic Church and Santería in a nation where many profess both religions simultaneously without contradiction. And so, since the African god Obatalá was fused with the Catholic Virgin of Mercy during the days of slavery, many Catholics who go to hear the Virgin's mass on Sunday morning dance to the drums of Obatalá on Sunday night.

Always respectful of Santería's secrets, the documentary explains the major ceremonies and deities of the religion: the divination of Ifá, the secret initiation of priests, and the batá drums; the warrior god Shangó also known as St. Barbara; the motherly sea goddess Yemayá Our Lady of Regla; Ochún, the patroness of love associated with Cuba's patron, Our Lady of Charity; and Oyá/St. Theresa, who receives the dead.

The documentary also discusses the role of divination and divine trance in the Santería religion from a variety of perspectives. As a Santería priest discusses the importance of these elements, a neurologist reflects on some of the scientific bases underlying them. The video also features Catholic clergy describing their understanding and acceptance of the Santería religion as a counterpart to Catholicism. This documentary dispels powerful stereotypes about Santería as it reveals the intimate connections between Cuba's two major religious traditions.

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***Afroargentines***

dir. Diego Ceballos & Jorge Fortes  
 Argentina, 2002, 75 minutes  
 Spanish with English subtitles

"Most Argentines, if you ask, will tell you: 'In Argentina there are no black people.'" So opens *Afroargentines*, a prizewinning documentary that unearths the hidden history of black people in Argentina and their contributions to Argentine culture, society, and history, from the slaves who fought in the revolutionary wars against Spain, to the contemporary struggles of black Argentines against racism and marginalization. The video uses historical material from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries alongside interviews with black Argentines from a variety of backgrounds: intellectuals and taxi drivers, immigrants from Africa and native Afroargentines. The story that unfolds provides a counternarrative to the national myth of Argentina's exclusively European heritage.

*Afroargentines* also exposes how the whitewashing of the Argentine self-image came about. Racist ideas about blacks as dangerous for national progress brought about such genocidal state policies as the drafting of blacks into the most dangerous positions in the army and their quarantining during the cholera epidemics, even as race mixture both diminished the black population and spread African blood throughout the Argentine population, including those who now consider themselves "white." But the descendants of the first black Argentines live on, their numbers bolstered by recent black immigrants. *Afroargentines* also represents their stories, depicting the lives of black immigrants from Cape Verde (such as the parents of co-director Jorge Fortes) and West Africa. These immigrants have made their own contributions and faced their own challenges in Argentine society.

*Afroargentines* responds to contemporary racism and marginalization by presenting the voices of individual Afroargentines, who recount their experiences of workplace discrimination, skinhead violence, the difficulty of interracial relationships, the double burden of black women, and the dangerous internalization of stereotypes by black Argentines themselves. They describe how Afroargentines have resisted racism through music, the media, and an incipient and growing political mobilization. *Afroargentines* provides an important challenge to the marginalization of blacks in Argentine official history by rescuing the story of Argentina's black cultural legacy from oblivion. It is also a gripping tale of the ways in which individual black Argentines have resisted and coped with everyday racism and are claiming their rightful place within Argentine history and culture.

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***Calabazos del Sol***

dir. Fernando Restrepo

Colombia, 2002, 15 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

An excellent companion piece to the documentary *Never Again*, *Calabazos del Sol* is a short video project that uses the metaphor of the “calabazo” to describe the way in which the children of Colombia’s troubled Chocó province experience the poverty and political conflict that they have witnessed. The calabazo is a pumpkin-like fruit, which in Latin America is dried and used as a natural container.

Like little calabazos, the video explains, children can be filled and nurtured with different kinds of experiences. The experiences that flow into the calabazo will affect the way the children construct their own environment in the future. The video uses images of children in the creative process to show that with love, even the children of trauma can go on to make positive contributions to their communities.

Against a backdrop of poverty and violence in this marginalized region, the video argues, the way to counteract these devastating elements is through a kind of resistance that speaks through culture, that understands the particular history of the Afro-Colombians, and that allows them to reclaim their dignity.

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**Candombe**

dir. Silvestre Jacobi

Uruguay, 2002, 58 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

In Carnival season, the black residents of Montevideo take to the streets to fill the Uruguayan capital with costumes, banners, and drums. The traditional black neighborhoods of Cuareim and Ansina fill with the insistent rhythm of drums as they have since the colonial era when the Spanish permitted the enslaved a short period of celebration to give them the strength to endure another year of hardship. This evocative, poetic documentary takes us into the world of this music and the men and women who make it.

Almost completely unknown in the United States, *candombe* music is a living legacy of Africa in the Americas, and an expression of the Afro-Uruguayan people, whose conservation of the drum has been a way of holding onto their history against a backdrop of cultural marginalization. Beautifully shot and poetically narrated, *Candombe* depicts the ways the venerable tradition of the street parades is lived today by regular people of the Afro-Uruguayan community: the elderly artisans who make the drums, the men and boys who drum, the young women who march and dance, and singers like local diva Martha Gularte, who despite her advanced age, appears every year dancing like a teenager in a low-cut sequined dress.

These men and women are pillars of the tradition. Their houses are veritable institutions of *candombe*, where the drums are made, the costumes are prepared, the songs are practiced, and most importantly, the tradition is renewed and passed on. The documentary shows us that *candombe* music is not just for the old; even children barely old enough to walk are shown marching, dancing and drumming in the parades. Filled with the color, rhythm, and poetry of black Uruguay, *Candombe* is a tribute to this vital expression of community solidarity and cultural resilience.

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***Ritual Rhythms: Candombe***

dir. Mabel Maio

Uruguay, 1999, 48 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

This informative video, filled with rhythm and pageantry, explores the history and modern reality of *candombe*, the drum music of Uruguay's black parade bands. But *candombe* is not merely the spectacle of the dancers and drummers, the glitter of the costumes and flags. It is a way of life that was born in the musical gatherings of slaves in urban marketplaces and plazas, continued in their incorporation into religious parades in the 18th century, and has been subject to both marginalization and cultural preservation ever since.

Since then, *candombe* has spread out beyond its black roots. In the era of globalization, Uruguayans of all backgrounds have embraced the music of the *candombe* drum as an expression of their national cultural identity and an emblem of the traditional roots of Uruguayan culture and society. The documentary, narrated by *candombe* historians, musicians, experts and pioneers like Lagrima Rios and Martha Gularte, explains how despite persistent racism, past and present, the 200,000 Uruguayans of African descent experience *candombe* as a way of life, as part of the cast of characters that inhabits the tenements of Montevideo's Reus and Ansina neighborhoods, where parents rock cradles with drummed lullabies, and poor children learn to play drums on oil cans.

Another part of *candombe* culture is the figures and institutions that populate it – not only the drummer but the vedette and the drummer. The drummer is a craftsman who knows the precise art of carving and pegging the drums, and tuning them by fire. The vedette is a woman who marches in front of a *candombe* group, her dancing and her sensuality the inspiration for it all. Moving from riveting musical performances to detailed discussions of the history of slavery and the historical development of *candombe*, this documentary is an exciting and informative introduction to *candombe*, the music of Afro-Uruguay.

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***Caurí: The Word of the Saint***

dir. Luis Acevedo Fals

Cuba, 1996, 27 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

In the beginning, the sea goddess Yemayá gave birth to the world - all the people, animals and plants of this world, the gods and saints of the other world, and the means for the two realms to communicate: the sacred cowrie shells. So say thousands of years of tradition brought from Africa by enslaved Yoruba people to Cuba, where it merged with Catholicism to form the Lucumí religion, often called Santería.

This video documents Santería in all its complexity. It explains the pantheon of gods and goddesses, and the foods, clothes, animals, festivals, colors, numbers, songs, and dances associated with each. It also explains the incredibly intricate system that has been used for generations as the means for the saints to communicate with humans: *dilogún*. In *dilogún*, there are 16 cowrie shells (in Spanish, *caurí*), each of which has its own name, saint, and set of meanings. Furthermore, each shell has 101 positions that the reader must interpret, setting aside the 100 paths that do not matter to find the appropriate one. These messages explain what has happened and what may happen, thereby helping believers navigate periods of hardship.

This documentary disproves stereotypes about Santería by highlighting its beauty, tradition, and ways by which its priests and specialists act as the bridge between the saints and their devotees, using the tool of the sacred cowrie.

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***Cuban Roots/Bronx Stories***

dir. Pam Sporn

USA, 2000, 56 minutes

Spanish and English with English subtitles

This documentary traces the tangled paths and multifaceted identity of a black Cuban family in the Bronx. The subjects of this documentary experienced firsthand some of the great historical events of the twentieth century – they saw Castro's arrival in Havana and had their neighborhood bombed in the Bay of Pigs invasion; one son fought in Vietnam and a daughter marched against it.

Both working-class and professional, black and Latino, foreign and native, Spanish-speaking and English-speaking, the family is shown in the constant process of negotiating its identity. On their arrival in Miami, the family immediately encountered racial segregation, and as children in a mixed Puerto Rican/African-American neighborhood in the Bronx, they were forced by their playmates to choose their identity: "Are you black or Spanish?" Even the family's roots in Cuba are tangled – the grandfather was the son of Jamaican immigrants to Cuba – and their relation to the Cuban Revolution is ambiguous.

The video explores the various experiences that each family member had in dealing with the realities of life as black Cuban-Americans in the Bronx. One son, stuck between his family and the code of the streets, became a drug addict before he found religion. Another son, in search of his roots, is shown returning to a Havana very different from the one where he was born, and where he discovers he cannot fit in. In tracing experiences of this one family and their movements from Jamaica to Cuba to New York, this documentary speaks to the larger issues of race, social class, and nation that help to shape the identities of everyday people.

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***The Forgotten Roots***

dir. Rafael Rebollar

Mexico, 2001, 50 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

Mexico has always imagined itself a nation forged from the encounter between Spaniards and indigenous people in the colonial past. But this story leaves out the roots that have been forgotten, if not deliberately erased: the story of Afro-Mexicans. This impressively researched documentary is one of the first to break the silence, acknowledging and exploring the history and influential cultural heritage of Africans in Mexico.

A significant portion of the documentary is dedicated to discussing the ways in which Africans and their descendants dealt with slavery and marginalization. The story of Afro-Mexicans is in many ways the story of resistance and acculturation as two different responses to their plight: as some slaves rebelled against their masters, others had children with them to advance themselves socially. Brought as slaves and servants to the conquistadors, Afro-Mexicans used both resistance and acquiescence to occupy a variety of places in Mexican colonial society, from exploited mine workers to wealthy landowners, and from servants to rebellious *cimarrones*.

And yet, even as the deep roots of Africa in Mexico have been forgotten, African-derived expressive culture continues to be an important presence in Mexican artistic and cultural life. This video highlights Mexico's dazzling hybrid traditions to illustrate the deep and pervasive footprints left by African culture in Mexican culture and society. The crowning example is the city of Veracruz, that bustling port of the "Afro-Andalusian Caribbean," with its bubbling hodgepodge of faces, races, and musical expressions that was the point of entry for the majority of the slaves to enter Mexico.

By emphasizing the presence of Africans in Mexico, this documentary refigures Mexican identity, working towards a reconciliation with those African roots of Mexican culture that have been forgotten for too long.

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***From Florida to Coahuila***

dir. Rafael Rebollar

Mexico, 2002, 50 minutes

Spanish and English with English subtitles

This documentary tells the remarkable story of a rebel people – the Mascogos, known in the United States as the Black Seminoles. This exceptional community, whose history crosses borders, languages, and cultures, has engaged in a long series of migrations and acts of resistance. The ancestors of the Mascogos escaped from slavery to Florida, where they made common cause with the Seminole Indians. The fierce battles of the Black and Indian Seminoles with the United States in the mid-1800s ended in truce rather than defeat, and they migrated west to resettle along both sides of the Mexican border. These furious fighters – the only Native American group that never signed a peace treaty with the United States – were recruited by both the Mexican and U.S. governments to defend the border from bandits, and served as an elite battalion attached to the U.S. Army. They continue to live in towns like Nacimiento in Coahuila, Mexico, and Bracketteville, Texas.

The exceptional Mascogo/Black Seminole culture combines African-American spirituals, Indian fry-bread, and Tex-Mex cowboy culture. Their old religion was based in dream divination, and their old language combined the tongues of the many homes they had known – West African, Native American, English, and Spanish. But these old ways have been dying along with the elders who practiced them, and young Mascogo and Black Seminoles have lost touch with a heritage that is not taught in school and which risks total assimilation into mainstream Mexican and U.S. culture. Filmed on both sides of the border, this video documents the fascinating history of people of African descent caught between national boundaries, and the efforts of their descendants to maintain their culture and instill a sense of pride in future generations of this warrior people.

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***It Seems Like Happiness***

dir. Aaron Vega

Cuba, 1997, 20 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

This documentary portrays a large public performance of “It Seems Like Happiness,” a work by the legendary Afro-Cuban artist Manuel Mendive in all its exuberance, sensuality, comic absurdity, and philosophical weight. In the Carnival atmosphere that Mendive creates in the streets of Havana, brightly colored bodies serve as living, dancing canvases for the artist’s trademark anthropomorphic animals, abstract shapes, and vivid hues.

Impressive for its scale, the energy of the performers, and its egalitarian proximity to the public, this was Mendive’s most ambitious work to date, reaching into both the primordial past and the post-modernist future, reconfiguring symbols from Afro-Cuban religion, elements from nature, avant-garde texts, and the unabashed beauty of the human body. The video not only documents the vibrancy of the work, and its enthusiastic if quizzical reception by the public, but the spirit of camaraderie between the artist and the various performers in the long hours of preparation for the performance – a valuable record of Mendive’s idiosyncratic genius.

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***Jump Over the Atlantic***

dir. María Eugenia Espárragoza  
Venezuela, 1990, 30 minutes  
Spanish with English subtitles

This remarkable documentary traces the ways in which culture is remembered and preserved despite the distances between Africa and the Americas that enslaved people were forced to travel. It shows these cultural continuities by highlighting artistic and domestic practices in a small Afro-Venezuelan village and in the Republic of the Congo in Africa, the place of origin of many of the people sold into slavery in Venezuela. It is also a showcase of the vital everyday and traditional cultural practices that the two groups share: music, dance, instruments, words, food, dress, crafts, healing herbs, and even hairstyles.

The video opens with an African song called “Malembe,” before segueing into a song by the same name in Venezuela. Rather than offering unnecessary commentary, the documentary simply cuts back and forth between its two sites – the resemblances between Congolese and Venezuelan practices are absolutely uncanny, although the Venezuelan versions have often clearly been influenced by the culture and religion of Venezuela.

The footage shot in each location was subsequently presented to audiences in the other, and thus we are treated to the reactions of the Congolese and Afro-Venezuelans upon viewing each other. Their commentary gives a sense of discovering a lost relative, as they simultaneously mourn the process by which Africans were ripped from their land and marvel at each other’s ability to conserve their vibrant traditions against the brutality of slavery and the inexorable march of time.

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**Motivations**

dir. Marisol Trujillo

Cuba, 1988, 14 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

This documentary features the renowned Cuban artist Manuel Mendive speaking about his enigmatic artwork. The combination of esoteric African and Afro-Cuban myth, Surrealism, and deliberate ingenuousness in his paintings and sculptures gives them a very mysterious character. *Motivations* serves to shed light on the creative process and environment that go into the creation of Mendive's work.

Although he claims that he can express more through his art than his words, Mendive's ruminations on his background in the Afro-Cuban Santería religion and the centrality of Africa in his work are revealing. In the video, Mendive describes how a recent trip to Angola altered his thinking about landscape and color, inspiring him towards his trademark utilization of painted bodies and cloth in outdoor performances. *Motivations* does not aim to provide the viewer with an overarching meaning for Mendive's work, but it allows the viewer to understand the complicated nature of his incorporation of influences from both African traditions and the European avant-garde in a particularly Cuban way. Above all, *Motivations* offers a multiplicity of contexts in which to view Mendive's bewitching and multifaceted art.

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***My Footsteps in Baraguá***

dir. Gloria Rolando

Cuba, 1996, 60 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

In the municipality of Baraguá, Cuba, the descendants of Protestant, English-speaking West Indian immigrants keep alive the spirit of their ancestors by preserving the stories and the customs of their immigrants forebears who came from Jamaica, Barbados, and other islands. Part of the massive circum-Caribbean labor migrations of the early part of the twentieth century, these men and women came to places like Cuba in search of work. West Indian culture is already a blend of African and British, and the arrival of “the British,” as the West Indians were called, added another element to the multifaceted mixture of Cuban culture.

This documentary shows how the West Indian community in Cuba has forged a common heritage, and still proudly holds on to its traditions in both public and private settings, from the public display of calypso music and the Anglican religion, to the use of English in the home and saying grace over meals. This documentary reveals the little known story of working-class black men and women who were cosmopolitan world citizens, equally at home in English and Spanish, and who traveled throughout the Caribbean. Many worked on the Panama Canal. All suffered the indignity of poor working conditions and segregation in U.S.-owned company towns. But the West Indians of Cuba retained pride in their traditions, ties with their homelands, and loyalty to the British crown.

This documentary by revered Afro-Cuban director Gloria Rolando takes a closer look at the contributions to Cuban culture made by this West Indian community and highlights their struggle to maintain their particular identity. In doing so, it sheds light on another facet of the African diaspora in the Caribbean.

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***Never Again***

dir. Marta Rodríguez & Fernando Restrepo  
Colombia, 2001, 56 minutes  
Spanish with English subtitles

In the violent and complicated conflict that has racked Colombia, it is always the most vulnerable who are the most affected. Co-directed by legendary Colombian filmmaker Marta Rodríguez, *Never Again* presents the stories of Afrocolombian peasants displaced from their land in the armed conflict between the Colombian army, Marxist guerillas, and the right-wing paramilitary in the isolated province of El Chocó. Their harrowing ordeal began with gruesome massacres by paramilitary death squads and caused their flight through arduous conditions to the city of Turbo and over the border to Panama, where they were placed in refugee camps under inhuman conditions.

This documentary captures their clamor for justice and repatriation to the lands they left behind, and their search for emotional closure through the processes of memory and testimony. The documentary weaves through the stories of the people of El Chocó themselves, who vividly recount through music, dance, art, and their own gripping narration the uprooting from humble lives in the rainforest to the degradation of the refugee camps. But their trauma did not leave them passive victims – an important part of their story is the political and cultural mobilization with which they are petitioning the Colombian government and the international community to ensure that their ordeal is never repeated. *Never Again* aims to make certain that their story, and their struggle, are heard.

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***Nganga Kiyangala***

dir. Tato Quiñones &amp; Luis Soto

Cuba, 1991, 33 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

Cuba was a site of the massive importation of enslaved Africans, who carried their spirituality with them to the New World. Although many people confuse the variety of religious and cultural traditions that came from Africa to Cuba, there is an incredible diversity that continues to be practiced today. This detailed documentary untangles the ties between the Santería religious practices of the Yoruba people, the Abakuá sects of the people of the Calabar, and the Nganga, Mayombe, and Palo Monte religions of the Bantu-speaking peoples of central Africa – known in Cuba as Congo. All of these religions are very fluid, and adherents of one often practice another as well, but each has a solid core.

The Congo religions are based in the power of Nsambi, the Supreme Being who is also a divine substance that manifests itself in everything that exists in the universe. But the more everyday practice of the Congo religions centers on honoring the *nganga*, ancestor spirits to whom the faithful pay homage with tobacco, rum, candles, and animal sacrifice. With gripping footage of Congo ceremonies and testimony from scholars and practitioners, the documentary shows the incredible aesthetic tradition of Congo design and its influence on modern Cuban artists such as Wilfredo Lam, and the integral presence of Congo-derived music in the Afro-Cuban musical expression of rumba. The video also documents and explains the role of spiritual trance in the Congo religions, showing it as a powerful and intimate connection to the forces of life and spirituality. *Nganga Kiyangala* makes an important contribution toward the understanding of a little-known phenomenon: Congo religiosity in Cuba.

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***Pierre Fatumbi Verger: Messenger between Two Worlds***

dir. Luiz Buarque de Hollanda

Brazil, 1998, 90 minutes

Portuguese with English subtitles

Photographer, ethnographer, author, world traveler, Parisian playboy, friend to kings, initiate of secret religious societies, Pierre Verger was a Frenchman driven by his own personal demons and the power of the African deities to devote his life to the study of the reciprocal cultural influences between Brazil and the Yoruba and Fon regions of West Africa.

But the story is not just Verger's. His life is used as an entryway into an exploration of the complex religious traditions that were brought from Africa to Brazil with slavery and live on in the cultural resilience and deep spirituality of the African and AfroBrazilian people. Verger, in his trips back and forth across the Atlantic, served more than once as a messenger bringing gifts and information for religious leaders in Brazil and West Africa, ultimately discovering that the trauma of Africans' forced migration to the New World had not sundered them from the African roots they continue to revere.

This sumptuously filmed documentary is narrated by renowned Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil, who takes us from Brazil to France, Benin, and Nigeria, where priests and kings, friends and colleagues, comment on the significance of Verger's life and the cultures in which he immersed himself. The documentary shows us not only the dances and divination ceremonies of Africa and Brazil, but also demonstrates the deep and pervasive ties of faith and family that exist between a people that even an ocean and the rupture of slavery cannot divide.

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***The Promised Ship***

dir. Luciano Capelli

Costa Rica, 2000, 51 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

Limón, Costa Rica, is a settlement of Jamaican and other West Indian immigrants who came to work on the banana plantations at the turn of the twentieth century. One of these laborers was Marcus Garvey, whose vision of black dignity and repatriation would later attract a following of more than six million black men and women across the Caribbean, Central America, and the United States. Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association was a massive black power movement in the early twentieth century, which founded a steamship line intended to transport black people back across the Atlantic to their ancestral homeland. Although Garvey's dream never came to fruition, his return to Limón, and the arrival of ships from his Black Star line, had a tremendous emotional impact on the black townspeople of Limón.

*The Promised Ship* traces the paths of black people from the real migrations of West Indians to Central America and other destinations in the Caribbean, to Garvey's dream for a final movement back to Africa. In the documentary, the old-timers of this forgotten fringe of the African diaspora recall Garvey's effect in giving the people of Limón a model of pride, dignity, and reverence for the African past and hope for black people's future that even Garvey's arrest by the fearful FBI could not quash. Some of the old people of Limón have even held onto the tickets they bought on the Black Star line 80 years ago, just in case one day that proud black ship sails into port to take them to the African promised land.

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***The Scorpion***

dir. Gloria Rolando

Cuba, 1999, 19 minutes

Spanish with English subtitles

Who stung the slave María Josefa? The Spaniard says it was the cockroach but the old African knows it was the scorpion... This vivid documentary treats the Scorpion Parade, a festival that fills the streets of Havana with music and color during Cuban Carnival season to re-enact the ancient legend of the Scorpion. Mixing present day parade footage, interviews, and rare period photos from the 1930s, *The Scorpion* tells the story of how the Carnival parades were originally brought from Africa by the slaves who cut sugarcane in the Cuban plantations. Once in Cuba, they mixed with European, Indian, and Asian cultures to create an event that is both a colorful spectacle of music and dance, and a deep affirmation of identity for Afro-Cuban people.

*The Scorpion* traces the origins of the Scorpion Parade from 1908, in the segregated setting of Old Cuba, where elegantly costumed whites in blackface paraded in carriages, and Afro-Cubans practiced their sacred drumming and dancing traditions in secret. In 1938, however, the Afro-Cuban Santos Ramírez organized the people of his working-class neighborhood to parade together, bringing the traditional dance, costumes, and music to the streets of Havana. The Scorpion Parade has remained a living expression of Cuban popular culture ever since.

The video explains how every detail of the lavishly decorated floats and papier-mâché puppets, the costumes of the musicians and dancers, have deep cultural meanings and historical resonance for black Cubans. We see the construction of the floats, and how each float is baptized and consecrated to a different African god. We see the representation through costumes of cane-cutters, sultans, African spirits, and top-hatted gentlemen. Most of all, we see how the parade acts in the everyday life of the people of the city itself, passed down from generation to generation by the matriarchs and patriarchs to the young children we see learning the dance to carry on this vibrant tradition.

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