

My Afro-Mexican research

In 1998, while I was at the University of Florida, I directed a dissertation based on field work in the Afro-Mexican community of San Nicolás de Tolentino (Guerrero), following up on the pioneering work of the Mexican anthropologist Aguirre Beltrán in the 1940's. The topic of Afro-Mexican language remained fallow for some time thereafter (I was to meet Norma Rosas Mayén, who was conducting research at the same time as I was, incorporated into her 2007 Purdue dissertation). In 2006 the Afro-Latin American Research Association (ALARA) was holding its bi-annual meeting in Veracruz, Mexico, and I decided to take advantage of this opportunity to do fieldwork among the Afro-Mexican communities.

Arriving in Mexico City, I took a local flight to Puerto Escondido on the Costa Chica of Oaxaca, and from the tiny airport I boarded a local van to the small town of Pinotepa Nacional, where I found lodging. My first foray was to the community of El Ciruelo, where I had been given the reference of a priest who ran a school.









I recorded several very interesting encounters in El Ciruelo, then in the neighboring hamlet of Estancia Grande.





Following these encounters, I traveled to Cuajicuinalapa, Guerrero, the “Cuijla” of Aguirre Beltrán’s study. Today Cuaji (as it is currently known) is quite urbanized, and the Afro-descendent culture is acknowledged in several places.





After conducting some interviews with knowledgeable elders in Cuaji (including one who had known Aguirre Beltrán), I visited San Nicolás for several days, where I interviewed many people, including the incredible 86-year old story teller Catalina Noyola.







I also recorded some interviews in the coastal community of Punta Maldonado “El Faro”.





Eventually I took a bus from Cuaji to Acapulco, and another bus to Mexico City, where I took a flight to Veracruz. After the ALARA meeting was over, I decided to explore the Afro-Mexican presence in Veracruz, particularly around the town of Yanga, named after a maroon rebel leader who in 1609 had successfully fought against Spanish efforts to re-enslave escaped Africans. Very similar to the history of Domingo Benko Biohó and the founding of the Afro-Colombian





"EL YANGA"
NEGRO AFRICANO PROVEEDOR DE LA LIBERTAD
DE LOS NEGROS ESCLAVOS
EN ESTE PUEBLO DE SAN LOPEZ DE CERRILLO (HUY YANGA)
POR MANDATO DEL REY DE NUEVA ESPAÑA
DON RODRIGO GONZALEZ MARQUEZ DE CERRILLO
EL DIA TRES DE OCTUBRE DEL AÑO DE 1531
POR MANDATO DEL REY
EN EL PUEBLO EL CAPITAN VERNANDO DE CASTRO ESPINOSA
AYUNTAMIENTO CONSTE
1973 - 1976

Y YANGA, VER AGOSTO 10 DE 1976
PRIMER PUEBLO LIBRE DE AMERICA

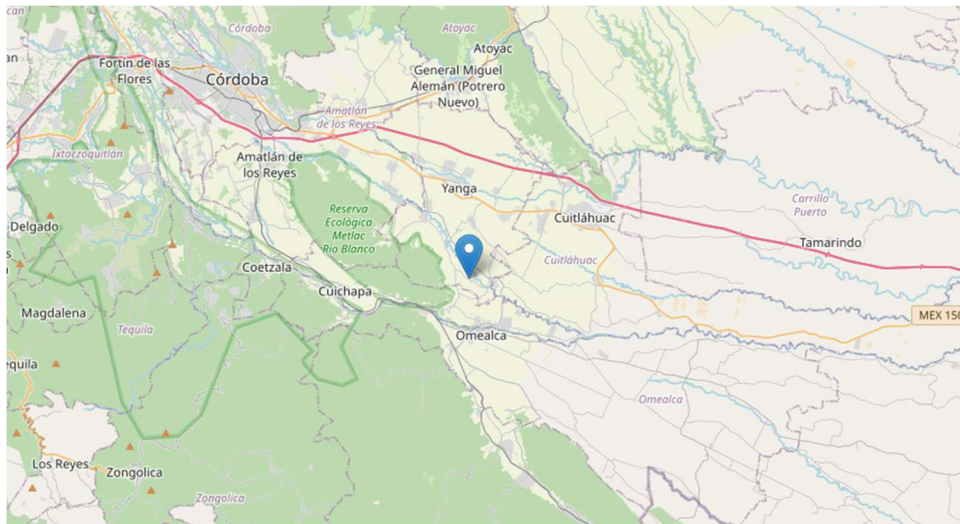


"JORNADA POR LA PATRIA"
PRESENCIA DE LOS SIMBOLOS NACIONALES
EN EL ESTADO DE VERACRUZ
1810
1985
YANGA, VER.
JULIO 20 DE 1985

EL PUEBLO Y EL GOBIERNO DE MEXICO
A
YANGA
PRIMER LIBERTADOR DE AMERICA
AÑO DE 1976



Just outside of Yanga is a tiny settlement called El Mirador, where Afro-descendent residents are still found, and where some aspects of traditional Afro-Mexican culture survive. I carried out some interviews in El Mirador.







On another day I visited the larger Afro-Mexican enclave of Mata Clara (San Francisco), with more interesting interviews during my visit.

