

## THE LIFE AND WORK OF NATIONAL HEROINE NANNY

The Rt. Excellent Nanny came to Jamaica as an enslaved African along with her five brothers – Cudjoe, Accompong, Johnny, Cuffy and Quao. Scholars believe that Nanny and her brothers were from the Ashanti tribe of West Africa.

When Nanny arrived in Jamaica, many revolts by enslaved people were taking place, and rebel towns inhabited by runaway slaves (Maroons) were scattered around the island. Nanny hated the severe cruelty meted out to enslaved females on the plantations. She found life on the plantations totally unacceptable and refused to live under those circumstances as she was accustomed to women being treated with respect.

Shortly after arriving in Jamaica, Nanny and her five brothers escaped from the estate on which they were placed and went to live in different parts of the island – Cudjoe went to St. James, Accompong went to St. Elizabeth, and Nanny and Quao went to Portland. They soon became the leaders of the Maroons in these areas. The Maroons led frequent raids on the plantations, freed the enslaved population, and took food and weapons.

Nanny became the leader of the Maroons who settled in the Blue Mountain region. In 1720, the community was named Nanny Town. She organised her Maroon society in a similar way to how an Ashanti tribe was organised. As a leader, she was regarded as a pillar of strength and an outstanding military tactician. Even the British respected her skill in planning warfare (which became widely known), as their troops were unable to penetrate the intricate defence system which she weaved around Nanny Town.

Nanny had placed guards at several lookout points in Nanny Town, and they blew their abengs if there were signs of unwelcome visitors. She also had spies on the plantations who informed her of any planned attacks by the British.

Nanny led over 800 Maroons for over 50 years, not only as their military leader, but she was also held in high esteem as their spiritual leader. The Maroons regarded her as a great magician with supernatural gifts.

### **Capture of Nanny Town**

The British captured and destroyed Nanny Town by using cannons. In 1734, Captain Stoddart and his troops bombed Nanny Town and claimed that all of the Maroons were killed. However, this was not true as Nanny and some of her followers escaped the attacks of the British and made a new hiding place near to the Rio Grande.

The British wanted peace but Nanny refused to sign a peace treaty. However, Nanny's brother, Cudjoe, signed a peace treaty with the British in 1739 in return for land and the right for his people to live as free men. Cudjoe promised to end the war against the British, to help to capture runaway slaves, and to assist the government in quelling revolts.

Nanny eventually agreed to a truce as she grew tired of war and her people wanted peace. After the truce, Nanny's Maroons split into two groups - one went with Quao to Crawford Town and the other went with Nanny to Cottawood where they received 500 acres of land. This area became known as the "New Nanny Town".

Nanny died in the 1750s. She is believed to be buried on a hill in Moore Town called Bump Grave. Nanny was made a National Heroine in 1975 and there is a memorial in her honour in National Heroes Park.



National Heroine Nanny

### **Bibliography**

Jamaica Information Service, *Nanny of the Maroons* (St. Andrew, Jamaica: JIS, 1995).

Olive Senior, *Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage* (St. Andrew, Jamaica: Twin Guinep Publishers, 2003), 343.

## **ACTIVITY**

### **FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS COMPREHENSION TEST**

Read the passage above and the sentences below, then unscramble the words and fill in the blanks with the correct answers.

vdealens Nanny came to Jamaica as an \_\_\_\_\_ African.

- ejcuod \_\_\_\_\_ is one of Nanny's five brothers.
- taeset Nanny and her five brothers escaped from the \_\_\_\_\_ where they were placed.
- saromon Nanny and her five brothers became the leaders of the \_\_\_\_\_.
- drsai The Maroons led frequent \_\_\_\_\_ on the plantations.
- yimtrila Nanny was regarded as an outstanding \_\_\_\_\_ tactician.
- mpub Nanny is believed to be buried on a hill in Moore Town called \_\_\_\_\_ Grave.
- iehnoer Nanny was made a National \_\_\_\_\_ in 1975.

Correct answers: Enslaved, Cudjoe, estate, Maroons, raids, military, bump, heroine.

### **The Words of the Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey**

"If the Negro is not careful he will drink in all the poison of modern civilisation and die from the effects of it."

Source: The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey. Compiled by Amy Jacques Garvey. Published by Frank Cass and Company Limited (1983), London, England.