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ETHNOHISTORY

Nancy Daniels: *A Barbadian Ex-Slave of Igbo Descent and the Igbo Legacy in Barbados*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Nancy Daniels, photographed in the 1850s, was an African born Barbadian ex-slave of probable Igbo descent.

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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NANCY DANIELS

Nancy Daniels: A Barbadian Ex-Slave of Igbo Descent and the Igbo Legacy in Barbados

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Nancy Daniels, an African-born Barbadian ex-slave, represents the enduring presence of Igbo heritage in the Caribbean. Born around 1760, she survived the brutal Middle Passage to Barbados in the 1780s, where she was enslaved to M. D’Azevedo. After his death, she became the property of the Daniels family and remained with them even after emancipation, working as a housekeeper until her passing in 1871. At the time of her death, she was said to have lived for 120 years, though official records listed her as 116. Nancy Daniels’ life serves as a testament to the resilience of enslaved Africans and the deep-rooted Igbo influence in Barbadian culture.

01

The Igbo Presence in Barbados

During the transatlantic slave trade, Barbados was a major destination for enslaved Africans, including a significant number of Igbo people. By the 18th and early 19th centuries, Igbo captives were among the largest African groups arriving on the island. Their cultural imprint can still be seen today in various aspects of Barbadian life, from language to folklore, spirituality, and social structures.

The Igbo influence on Bajan (Barbadian) English is particularly notable, as some Igbo words have been retained in local dialects. This linguistic retention highlights the strong cultural connections between the Igbo of West Africa and their descendants in the Caribbean.

02

Bussa and the Igbo Spirit of Resistance

One of the most famous figures of Barbadian history, Bussa, was an enslaved African who led the 1816 slave rebellion against British rule. Though little is known about his origins, the celebrated Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite described him in his poem *Heroes* as a “short Ibo man wid dis lion eye,” indicating that Bussa may have been of Igbo descent. The Igbo were known for their resistance to slavery, often engaging in acts of rebellion, suicide, or escape rather than accept enslavement.

03

Survival and Legacy

Despite the horrors of slavery, Nancy Daniels’ long life symbolizes survival and perseverance. Her story is part of a larger narrative of Igbo endurance in the Caribbean. The Igbo influence in Barbados extends beyond individual lives to the very fabric of the island’s culture, where echoes of Igbo traditions persist in language, folklore, and historical memory.

Nancy Daniels’ life serves as a historical link between the Igbo of West Africa and the people of Barbados. Her survival of the Middle Passage, enslavement, and eventual emancipation is a powerful reminder of the resilience of African people in the face of oppression. Furthermore, the presence of Igbo heritage in Barbadian culture, particularly through figures like Bussa, reinforces the lasting impact of Igbo identity in the diaspora.

Barbados National Trust. (n.d.). Story and photo of Nancy Daniels.

Brathwaite, K. (1988). Heroes. Oxford University Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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