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The Garinagu (*singular* **Garifuna**, pronounced 'gah-RIF-oo-na') are descendants of Carib, Arawak and West African people. The British colonial administration used the term *Black Carib* and Garinagu to distinguish them from *Yellow* and *Red Carib*, the Amerindian population that did not intermarry with Africans. The Amerindians who had not intermarried with Africans are still living in the Lesser Antilles; Dominica, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, etc.

Today the Garifuna live primarily in Central America. They live along the Caribbean Coast in Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras including the mainland, and on the island of Roatán. There are also diaspora communities of Garinagu in the United States, particularly in Los Angeles, Miami, New York and other major cities.

History

The French missionary Raymond Breton, who arrived in the Lesser Antilles in 1635, and lived on Guadeloupe and Dominica until 1653, took ethnographic and linguistic notes of the native peoples of these islands, including St Vincent which he visited only briefly. According to oral history noted by the English governor William Young in 1795 Carib-speaking people of the Orinoco came to St. Vincent long before the arrival of Europeans to the New World, where they subdued the local inhabitants called Galibeis. [Read More](#)

They lived along with the Carib men. Young recorded the arrival of the African descended population as commencing with a wrecked slave ship from the Bight of Biafra in 1675. The survivors, members of the Mokko ethnicity from today's Nigeria (now known as Ibibio) reached the small island of Bequia, where the Caribs brought them to Saint Vincent and ill-used them. When the Carib masters felt that the Africans were too independent in spirit, according to Young, they planned to kill all the male children. The Africans, learning of this plan revolted, killed as many Caribs as possible and withdrew to the mountains, where they joined with other runaways who had taken refuge there. From there they raided the Caribs continually until they had greatly reduced them in numbers.^[2] There are few other accounts of the island, as it was not occupied by Europeans and visitors were rare or there unofficially, hence Young's account is the only one of the century before he wrote to provide specific details of the origins of the Garifuna.

Britain and France both laid conflicting claims on Saint Vincent from the late seventeenth century onward. French pioneers began informally cultivating plots on the island around 1710 and in 1719 the governor of Martinique sent a force to occupy it, but was repulsed by the inhabitants. A British attempt in 1723 was also repelled.^[3] In 1748, Britain and France agreed to put aside their claims and Saint Vincent was declared a neutral island, under no European sovereign.^[4] Throughout this period, however, unofficial, mostly French settlement took place on the island, especially on the Leeward side.

In 1763, the Treaty of Paris awarded Britain rule over Saint Vincent. After a series of Carib Wars, which were encouraged and supported by the French, and the death of their leader Satuye (Chatoyer), they surrendered to the British in 1796. The British considered the Black Caribs enemies and deported them to Roatán, an island off the coast of Honduras. In the process, the British separated the more African-looking Caribs from the more Amerindian-looking ones. They decided that the former were enemies who had to be deported, while the latter were merely "mised" and were allowed to remain. Five thousand Black Caribs were deported, but only about 2,500 of them survived the voyage to Roatán. Because the island was too small and infertile to support their population, the Garinagu petitioned the Spanish authorities to be allowed to settle on the mainland. The Spanish employed them, and they spread along the Caribbean coast of Central America.

In recent history, Garinagu have thrown off their British appellation and encourage others to refer to them as Garifuna (Garinagu-plural). The Garifuna population is estimated to be around 600,000 both in Central America, Yurumein (St. Vincent and The Grenadines) and the United States of America. The latter, due to heavy migration from Central America, has become the second largest hub of Garifuna people outside Central America. New York has the largest population, heavily dominated by Hondurans, Guatemalans and Belizeans. Los Angeles ranks second with Belizean Garinagu being the most populous, followed by Hondurans and Guatemalans. There is no information regarding Garinagu from Nicaragua having migrated to either the East or the West Coast of the United States. Nicaraguan Garifuna are few. They are learning the Garifuna language and acquiring the different cultural aspects.

Language

Garifuna is an Arawakan language spoken in Honduras, Belize, Guatemala and Nicaragua by the Garifuna people. Their language is primarily derived from Arawak and Carib, with English, French and Spanish to a lesser degree. One interesting feature of Garifuna is a vocabulary split between terms used only by men and terms used only by women. This does not however affect the entire vocabulary but when it does, the terms used by men generally come from Carib and those used by women come from Arawak. Almost all Garifuna are bilingual or polylingual, speaking the official languages of the countries they inhabit such as Spanish, Kriol and English most commonly as a first language.

Religion

Today, the majority of Garifuna are officially Catholic but there are some that are following other religions. However, it is syncretized with traditional beliefs held well before their conversion to the Catholic faith. A shaman known as a *buyei* is the head of all Garifuna traditional practices. The religion has some similar qualities to the voodoo rituals performed by other tribes derived from Africa. Mystical practices and participation in the Dugu orders are also widespread among Garifuna. Some individuals from Sein Bight and Dangriga, Belize have claimed to have seen feats of levitation.

There is also a Rastafarian minority, primarily living in Dangriga, Belize City, Belize, and in Livingston, Guatemala. There are also some Muslim Garifuna.

Culture

In 2001 UNESCO proclaimed the language, dance and music of the Garifuna as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Belize. In 2005 the First Garifuna Summit was held in Corn Island, Nicaragua with the participation of the government of other Central American countries.

Food

There is a wide variety of Garifuna dishes, including the more commonly known *ereba* (cassava bread)

made from grated cassava, garlic, yuca, and salt. This is done in an ancient and time-consuming process involving a long, snake-like woven basket (

ruguma

) which strains the cassava of its juice. It is then dried overnight and later sieved through flat rounded baskets (

hibise

) to form flour that is baked into pancakes on a large iron griddle.

Ereba

is fondly eaten with fish,

hudut

(pounded plantains) or alone with gravy (

lasusu

). Others include:

bundiga

(a plantain

lasusu

),

mazapan

, and

bimecacule

(sticky sweet rice).

Music

Main article: Garifuna music

Garifuna music is quite different from the rest of Central America. The most famous form is punta. Its associated musical style, which has the dancers move their hips in a circular motion. An evolved form of traditional music, still usually played using traditional instruments, punta has

seen some modernization and electrification in the 1970s; this is called punta rock. Traditional punta dancing is consciously competitive. Artists like Pen Cayetano helped innovate modern punta rock by adding guitars to the traditional music, and paved the way for later artists like Andy Palacio, Children of the Most High and Black Coral. Punta was popular across the region, especially in Belize, by the mid-1980s, culminating in the release of

Punta Rockers

in 1987, a compilation featuring many of the genre's biggest stars.

Other forms of Garifuna music and dance include: hungu-hungu, combination, wanaragua, abaimahani, matamuerte, laremuna wadaguman, gunjai, sambai, charikanari, eremuna egi, paranda, berusu, punta rock, teremuna ligilisi, arumahani, and Mali-amalihani. Punta is the most popular dance in Garifuna culture. It is performed around holidays and at parties and other social events. Punta lyrics are usually composed by the women. Chumba and hunguhungu are a circular dance in a three-beat rhythm, which is often combined with punta. There are other songs typical to each gender, women having eremwu eu and abaimajani, rhythmic a cappella songs, and laremuna wadaguman, men's work songs, chumba and hunguhungu, a circular dance in a three-beat rhythm, which is often combined with punta.

Drums play a very important role in Garifuna music. There are primarily two types of drums used: the *primero* (tenor drum) and the *segunda* (bass drum). These drums are typically made of hollowed-out hardwood such as mahogany or mayflower, with the skins coming from the peccary (wild bush pig), deer, or sheep.

Also used in combination with the drums are the *sisera*. These shakers are made from the dried fruit of the gourd tree, filled with seeds, then fitted with hardwood handles.

Paranda music developed soon after the Garifunas arrival in Central America. The music is instrumental and percussion-based. The music was barely recorded until the 1990s, when Ivan Duran of Stonetree Records began the Paranda Project.

In contemporary Belize there has been a resurgence of Garifuna music, popularized by musicians such as Andy Palacio, Mohobub Flores, & Adrian Martinez. These musicians have taken many aspects from traditional Garifuna music forms and fused them with more modern sounds. Described as a mixture of punta rock and paranda. One great example is Andy

Palacio's album *Watina*, and *Umalali: The Garifuna Women's Project*, both released on the Belizean record label Stonetree Records.

In the Garifuna culture, there is another dance called Dugu. This dance is a ritual done for a death in the family to pay their respect to their loved ones. In 2001, Garifuna music was proclaimed one of the masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO.

Gender Relations

Gender roles within the Garifuna communities are significantly defined by the job opportunities available to everyone. The Garifuna people have relied on farming for a steady income in the past, but much of this land was taken by fruit companies in the 20th century.^[5] These companies were welcomed at first because the production helped bring an income to the local communities, but as business declined these large companies sold the land and it has become inhabited by mestizo farmers.

[6]

Since this time the Garifuna people have been forced to travel and find jobs with foreign companies. The Garifuna people mainly rely on export businesses for steady jobs; however, women are highly discriminated against and are usually unable to get these jobs.

[7]

Men generally work for foreign-owned companies collecting timber and chicle to be exported, or work as fishermen.

[8]

Garifuna people live in a matrilineal society, but the women are forced to rely on men for a steady income in order to support their families, because the few jobs that are available, housework and selling homemade goods, do not create enough of an income to survive on.^[9] Although women have power within their homes, they rely heavily on the income of their husbands.

Garifuna women believe in the power of obeah (magic) in order to control the men in their lives.^[10]

It is common for Garifuna men to have multiple girlfriends or relationships with women in addition to a marriage. The Garifuna women believe that this magic controls the men and helps keep their husbands in love with them.

[10]

It is important for women to have a strong relationship with their husband in order to have the

money they need to support their family.

Although men can be away at work for large amounts of time they still believe that there is a strong connection between men and their newborn sons. Garifunas believe that a baby boy and his father have a special bond, and they are attached spiritually.^[9] It is important for a son's father to take care of him, which means that he must give up some of his duties in order to spend time with his child. [9]

During this time women gain more responsibility and authority within the household.

Even though women have a significant say in how their household is run, many still suffer from abuse from their husbands.^[11] Many women tolerate this abuse because they feel they are dependent on the men in their lives and the money that they are able to provide.

[12]

The Garifuna culture is greatly affected by the economic atmosphere surrounding the community. This makes the communities extremely susceptible to outside influence. Many worry that the area will become extremely commercialized since there are few economic opportunities within the area.^[13]

{jcomments on}

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[edit] Notes

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