

**THE FIRST PRIMER ON
THE PEOPLE CALLED
GARIFUNA.....**

the things you have always wanted to know!



Myrtle Palacio
Glessima Research & Services



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Dedications

*This booklet is dedicated to the youths of Belize
Let us find ourselves*

*Thanks.....
Arreini, Aniki, Joseph*

Photographs are through the courtesy of
Joseph O. Palacio

The cover photograph is from a
postcard by Pen Cayetano

FOREWORD

The information for this booklet comes from several telephone calls I received about the Garifuna--their history, culture, current social conditions etc. It happens every year especially around the nineteenth of November Garifuna Settlement Day. Questions come from students, teachers, media personnel, members of the public, etc. While there is an increasing thirst for information there is hardly any easily available and quickly read material that could serve as reference. I truly hope that it could be this booklet. With a clear conscience I can direct inquiring minds to this booklet.

I have tried to strike a balance between a scholarly product and a popular brochure format. I have left out references with the exception of some main bibliographic leads in the back. Whereas I have tried to impart information that I have collected from several sources over the years, I have also implanted my own perspective, which remains sympathetic to the Garifuna while being aware that there is so much more work that has to be done. Research information about the Garifuna increases as scholars strive to find the key to these truly enigmatic people. As a result, what is fact today may change from new research tomorrow.

Be that as it may, I have put together bits of information that have remained part of conventional wisdom and would probably remain so for years. Who knows?

Myrtle P.

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THE EREBA MAKING PROCESS



the bitter cassava, peeled and washed



women grating the bitter cassava



sifting the dried, strained cassava



straining the grated bitter cassava



baking the cassava on a budári



eréba—the finished product

Garifuna History

An Introduction

After 1200 A.D. the Caribs arrived in the Lesser Antilles from Southeastern South America. They dominated the Arawaks taking the women as wives and men as slaves. By the 1600's the Caribs/Arawaks on St. Vincent had already intermarried with run away slaves resulting in two groups, the Black Caribs and Yellow Caribs. Presently although Black Caribs have black features, they speak a language that is primarily Amerindian--a mixture of both Cariban and Arawakan languages. They exhibit cultural patterns that are both Amerindian and African--for example, the johncanoe dance which is performed in Belize by the Garifuna is basically of African origin and is also still performed in several Caribbean islands. Food stuff like the bitter cassava used to make ereba (called cassava bread) which is still very much a part of Garifuna culture, is borrowed from the Amerindians. The same ereba processing methods utilized by Garinagu in Belize are still practiced by Amerindians in Guyana and Venezuela. So then the

Garinagu are an amalgam of three groups, namely two Amerindian peoples, Carib and Arawak and assorted African peoples. They are indigenous to the eastern Caribbean subregion with biological and cultural roots going back more than 700 years.

Arrival of the Europeans

The English and French moved into the Lesser Antilles in 1625. After 35 years of continuous warfare with the Caribs, who had already intermixed by that time with both Europeans and Africans, the two colonizers agreed to guarantee to the Caribs the perpetual possession of St. Vincent and Dominica. The British broke this guarantee in 1668 and imposed a new treaty of domination on the Caribs. The first colonizers to live among the Caribs were the French in the mid 1600's, who although they were interested in the lands were also interested in converting the Caribs into French culture. It was not to be so. However, the French did succeed in the early 1700's to divide the Caribs into two political groups, Yellow Caribs against the Black Caribs. The Yellow Caribs became valuable allies to them in their plans to take over the island.

The year 1763 marked the first attempt by Britain to exercise full control in their sovereignty over St. Vincent by planting settlers there. The years that followed saw a series of guerilla wars between the Black Caribs and British for control of the island. To their own advantage the French assisted the Black Caribs in these skirmishes, having established greater association with them over an extended period of time. Most fatal to the Black Caribs was the so called Carib war of 1795-1796. The British sent more troops and armed the local whites and slaves to do battle with them. This along with an epidemic at the time and the assassination of their paramount leader Joseph Chatoyer was effective in totally demoralizing them. The black Caribs surrendered in July 1796.

Carib/African Relations

In 1635 two Spanish ships carrying African Slaves to the New World were shipwrecked off St. Vincent. By the time the first Europeans settled, there were already numerous Black Caribs on the island. The natural increase was assisted by a constant flow of runaway slaves from the nearby

islands of Barbados, Martinique and Guadelupe.

On the other hand, the Amerindian population already diminished by European wars and diseases, continued to lose members in skirmishes with the Black Caribs and continuous intermarriage with Africans.

Expulsion From Homeland St. Vincent (called Yurumei)

After the Black Caribs surrendered in 1796 the British decided to send them to the island of Roatan in Honduras hundreds of miles away from their native island of St. Vincent also called Yurumei in Garifuna. Between July 21, 1796 to February 2, 1797 some 4,195 were first sent to the small island of Baliseau near St. Vincent in preparation for the exile. Baliseau was miserably inadequate for such a number. Overcrowding, contagious diseases, lack of fresh water, and poor food supply further overwhelmed the reserve of a defeated people. On March 3, 1797 only 2,248 (nearly 50% less) were left to make the journey. On that day they were hurled in humiliation and shipped to Roatan. Three hundred of them were ill on embarkation. On April 12, 1797,

some 664 men, 720 women, 642 children totalling 2,026 arrived in Roatan opening a new chapter in the life of the Black Caribs.

To The Country Now Called Belize

In Trujillo, Honduras the Black Caribs were immediately re-introduced to wage labour and trading, in both of which they had already experienced with Europeans in St. Vincent. Obviously some were resentful of the poor treatment by the Spanish, and started the move to Belize around 1801/1802. However, recalling the war-like characteristics of the Black Caribs which had inflicted so much damage on them in St. Vincent less than a decade earlier, the British were most suspicious of the few stragglers arriving at the Settlement. But the Black Caribs could be helpful. To the British they made convenient allies against the Spaniards (remember the battle of St. George's Caye just 3 years beforehand in 1798) and they made valuable wood cutters as slave ownership had become expensive due to lack of replenishment. The Black Caribs were allowed to settle in a remote uninhabited part of the country, namely, the Stann Creek area, which was still under

dispute according to the 1786 Convention between Spain and Britain.

The British restricted the movements of the Black Caribs by law to remote mahogany camps in the south, central, and north of the country as they continued a wage labour economic existence. There they interacted with Creole, Maya, Mestizo and other Belizeans who were kept in a state of dependency by the British through the "advance" system. At the mahogany camps also, inter-marriages took place between the Black Caribs and other Belizeans. Land was not readily available and as the men were absent for very long times, it became very difficult for the Black Caribs to permanently establish themselves within their own communities in southern Belize. Whatever agriculture and fishing they did was primarily for subsistence.

The mass movement of the Black Caribs to Belize from Honduras occurred in 1832. The triggering factor was the defeat of conservative Spanish forces who had enlisted the support of the Black Caribs in their effort to regain colonial possession of Honduras. Large numbers of both Ladinos and Black Caribs escaped to Belize to save their lives. The

population of Belize in 1860 showed that there were approximately 2,300 persons of Black Carib descent, and that approximately 25% had mixed with other groups particularly the Creole and the "Indians".

Present Situation of The Garinagu

Overview

The Black Caribs of Belize prefer to be called by their name in their native language, Garifuna in the singular form and Garinagu in the plural form (stress on the second syllable "ri" for both). This term Garifuna is a way of expressing identity which is now current since 1970's when it was legitimized. There are presently 12,274 Garinagu in Belize representing 6.6% of the total population. Garinagu are found in all the six districts of Belize (see map on pg. 21). However, they still predominate in three districts, namely, Stann Creek, Belize and Toledo Districts (see table below). It is important to note that up to the census of 1980 the Garifuna along with the Kekchi and Mopan Maya were reported together as one group under Amerindians.

District	No.	% of District Pop.	% of Garifuna Pop.
Stann Creek	6323	34.2%	51.5%
Belize	2852	5.3%	23.2%
Toledo	1751	10.0%	14.3%
Cayo	819	1.7%	5.1%
Corozal	361	1.3%	1.0%
Orange Walk	301	1.2%	2.5%

The above table shows that 36.2% of all persons in the Stann Creek District are Garifuna and that 51.5%



Implements used in the eréba making process



kitchen implements– fanien and bagára

of the total Garifuna population reside in the Stann Creek District, in communities such as Dangriga, Hopkins, George Town, Seine Bight. Similarly 23.7% of the Garifuna population reside in Belize District primarily in Belize City, and 14.3% reside in the Toledo District primarily in Punta Gorda and Barranco. Some 65% of the Garifuna population reside in the southern districts which are known to be the most underdeveloped in the country. The Garinagu have fast become an urban resident group as the 1991 Census places 77% (9,435) in the urban areas of the above three districts. Also 6.6% of total population represents a decline of 1% among the total Belizean population. In absolute numbers the increase has only been approximately 1,000 in ten years. Hence the Garinagu are not increasing through the margin of death over birth. The primary reasons for this are out-migration and the loss of some members through inter-ethnic mixing with other peoples, mainly the Creoles. The out-migration is more pronounced in the villages and in Dangriga Town (stress on the second syllable "gri"). According to the 1991 census report Dangriga lost over 3% of its population, while increasing population (54%) in Stann Creek rural

mainly with Central Americans.

The migratory wage labour which started in St. Vincent through the plantation economy has been significant in Garifuna livelihood and continues to this century. From the early 1800's to the first half of this century, Garifuna society was slowly being transformed from a rural peasantry to a group increasingly dependent on wage labour. In Belize, young men were recruited into teaching in very remote non-Garifuna communities all over the country. Early 1900's large numbers of men moved to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala for brief periods during the heights of the Banana days using their knowledge of English to secure clerical jobs with the United Fruit Company.

Later some went further away as merchant marines or on contract labour to Panama, Great Britain, and the United States. The 1980's show a significant migration on a permanent basis from rural to urban, with movements out of the country primarily to large cities in the U.S. This mass movement away from the coastal settlements is the latest phase in the evolution of the Garifuna society. One inevitably asks the question--What does this mean for culture change in the near future? Some Garifuna communities

have been experiencing some disadvantages of out-migration that of uprooting leadership, disrupting family life, which together helps to erode the culture of the young.

In the past the economic contribution of the Garifuna as a group to the country of Belize was in education, as teachers in the rural areas of the country. Although some are still teachers, Garinagu may be found in all careers in Belize. Besides, several other groups have entered the teaching profession taking away the lead that the Garifuna had long established. However, one social and economic contribution--probably more a potential than a reality--is the Punta Rock which has received national acceptance as Belize's own popular dance music.

Presently Carib descendants can be found in several Caribbean Islands such as, Trinidad, Guyana, Dominica, St. Vincent, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, and Guadalupe. On the Atlantic coast Garifuna population is approximately 225,000, with an additional 90,000 (approximation) in the United States.

Culture

For a culture to be viable, there has to be certain prerequisites for maintaining material resources to serve the needs of the people in that culture. For example if fish and ground provisions are the staple foods then one has to produce these food items to maintain the diet in that culture. In the case of the Garifuna some of these basic functions are not being met and so the integral structure of the culture is greatly endangered as the culture becomes increasingly exposed to outside influences. One of the main factors that have been disruptive for the Garifuna culture arises from the lack of a base in their traditional settlements to stay and maintain their culture. Since the last 15 years we have experienced the rapid erosion of the Garifuna culture. Most of the young people, even those living in predominantly Garifuna communities, no longer speak the language or mix Garifuna with Creole as in the case of Barranco.

The traditional religion called *dügü* is still a very popular method of healing both physically and psychologically. The *dügü* ritual is a whole week of activities, dancing, chanting, food sharing, and the

official celebrant is the *Buyei*. The most sacred part of the *dũgũ* is the *mali* or *ámalihani* a dance led by the *Buyei* and the drummers. During the *mali*, the placating of the *gubida* (spirits of ancestors) takes place. The congregation forms behind the *Buyei* who faces the drummers as they all move in first a counter clock-wise and then a clock-wise direction around the *Babũyaba*, halting at positions to mark the four cardinal directions. These motions signify the directions from which power is drawn and in which the spirits may reside. Each *mali* is dedicated to an ancestral spirit. Normally some dancers enter into trance signifying that the ancestors have arrived at the ceremony. Preparation for the *dũgũ* takes about a year.

The Garifuna music, chants and dances are a rich and creative combination of Amerindian and African elements. The chants, *abéimahani* done by women and *arúmahani* by men are performed without music. The traditional musical instruments comprise two drums called the *primero* and *segunda*. There are several traditional dances which are still performed in all Garifuna communities. Some of these dances are:

Chumba--A highly accented polyrhythmic beat, danced by soloists with great individualistic style. The dancer commands the rhythm required from the primero drummer. The action portrays everyday life.

Chárikanári--a masked danced performed usually at Christmas time. It is a mixed dance requiring four dancers, two dressed as women dancing in a circle, one as a hunterman, and fourth as a cow. The hunterman and the cow each tries to outsmart the other for the affection of the dancers in the ring.

Manáragua (Johncane)--a masked danced also performed during Christmas time. This is a dance of satire, mimicking the white master. The mask signifies a white face and the white suite is significant of the white master's traditional attire. It is believed that this was a popular dance with the two black groups (Creole and Garifuna) during their "meeting" in the mahogany camps, as the words for some of the songs are in Creole.

Punta--a national favourite danced to a fast beat of the drums by couples in a ring. The concentration is on the movement of the hips. The Punta rock is a version of the Punta.

Other dances not listed above are: *Piamanadi*, *Wáriní*, *Sanbéi*, *Gunjéi*, *Hungú Hungú*, and *Paránda*.

There are several Garifuna dishes and beverages that are still consumed today, both of which come under the generic term *éiginí*. Joseph Palacio's doctoral study says that a large percentage of Garifuna dishes utilize liquids, a gravy called *lásusu* or *íradinóú*. Spices commonly used are oregano, salt, pepper, *barien* and *basei*. Most dishes are served with fish (*úúúroú*) either fried or boiled in the *lásusu*. Let's look at the following list of *éiginí*:

Mudutu--this is pound green plantain traditionally served with gravy made from coconut milk (*fálumoun*) and a topping of fish and ochra. A gravy made with browned flour garnished with cabbage and tomato called *tikini*, and *dunóuti* a gravy made with sauted onions and water are also choices. The green plantain may be mixed with ripe plantain (a ratio of 1:4) to give a slight sweetish taste. Sometimes a yam called *afu* is substituted for plantain. Incidentally pound plantain is a delicacy in Trinidad and Tobago, part of a dish called "boil down" which is similar to Belize's "boil up".

Bãndiga--this is similar to the Creole's Matilda foot; dumplings made of grated green bananas or green "blogo" boiled in coconut milk, topped with fish and or crab when in season.

Tapóu--is diced green banana or green plantain boiled in coconut milk or *dunóuti*.

Darása--grated green banana or green "blogo" garnished with seasonings and a little coconut milk. This is wrapped in green "waha" leaf tied and boiled.

Harábada--grated green banana and grilled between "waha" leaves.

Dáni--the method is similar to darasa above, except that this is sweet. Made from grated sweet cassava, sweetened and wrapped in "waha" leaf and boiled.

Bimekakúle--this is also a sweet dish. It is similar to a rice pudding; sweetened and seasoned rice is boiled in a large iron pot. It is normally served at festivities.

There are two different kinds of beverages, namely, *bacháti* or tea and *bébirigi* or porridge. Examples of *bacháti* are: 1. two kinds of coffee, roasted dried corn kernel and *fréhilio*, roasted seed from an indigenous plant called *hágúra haú*; 2. teas

made from boiled leaves of plants such as the fevergrass, citrus etc. These are served with breads such as fein-Creole bread, durudia-flour tortilla, and fry jack. When tea in the second example above is mixed with coconut milk it is called gumbuledu. Examples of the other beverage bébirigi are the following:

Lális--made from bread fruit and coconut milk, boiled, mashed and sweetened.

Sahóú--made from grated sweet cassava.

Guréntu & Letu--made from ripe banana and ripe plantain respectively. It is boiled, pound in a hana (mortar) and mixed with coconut milk.

Puláfi--a porridge made from flour. It is sweetened flour dumplings.

Gungudé--made from dried, green banana. The banana is pounded and sifted to make a fine flour. This flour is boiled and sweetened. A very good weaning food.

Pindle--made from corn kernel, ground, roasted, boiled and then sweetened.

There are several other traditional dishes and beverages. However, these are not commonly consumed today.

Mobilization--State of Organization

Since 1926 efforts at organizing Garifuna movements have been documented. Advocacy efforts in which several leaders have emerged have extended to cultural awareness and education. One leader T.V. Ramos of Dangriga successfully advocated for a day to recognize the contributions of the Garifuna. This is November 19, Garifuna Settlement Day. He also encouraged the education of women as nurses in Dangriga. Since the 1970's other leaders have emerged to further advocate the extension of Settlement Day Celebrations to the entire country. Other successful results of advocacy by Garifuna leaders are: changing the name of Stann Creek Town to Dangriga (indigenous name) and re-naming the Elejo Beni Park in Dangriga.

The primary Garifuna movement presently is the National Garifuna Council (NGC). It was formed in 1981 and its major objectives are to preserve the culture and to promote economic development in Garifuna communities. It is a grassroots organization with ten branches throughout Belize. The NGC has survived mainly on the voluntary efforts of its members, and much of its financial resources come

from fundraising activities. Some of the achievements are as follows:

1. Sponsor workshops
2. Negotiated for title to two properties in Dangriga
3. Have set the foundation to the People's Culture House in Dangriga
4. Produced a People's Garifuna dictionary
5. Broadcast a weekly cultural radio programme, Hamalali Garinagu
6. Produced a quarterly newsletter, Win Win Gue Wadabagei
7. Sponsor High School scholarships
8. Organize and finance the Garifuna Settlement Day celebrations

The NGC has collaborated with government organizations, NGO's and private sector organizations in its effort at accomplishing its objectives.

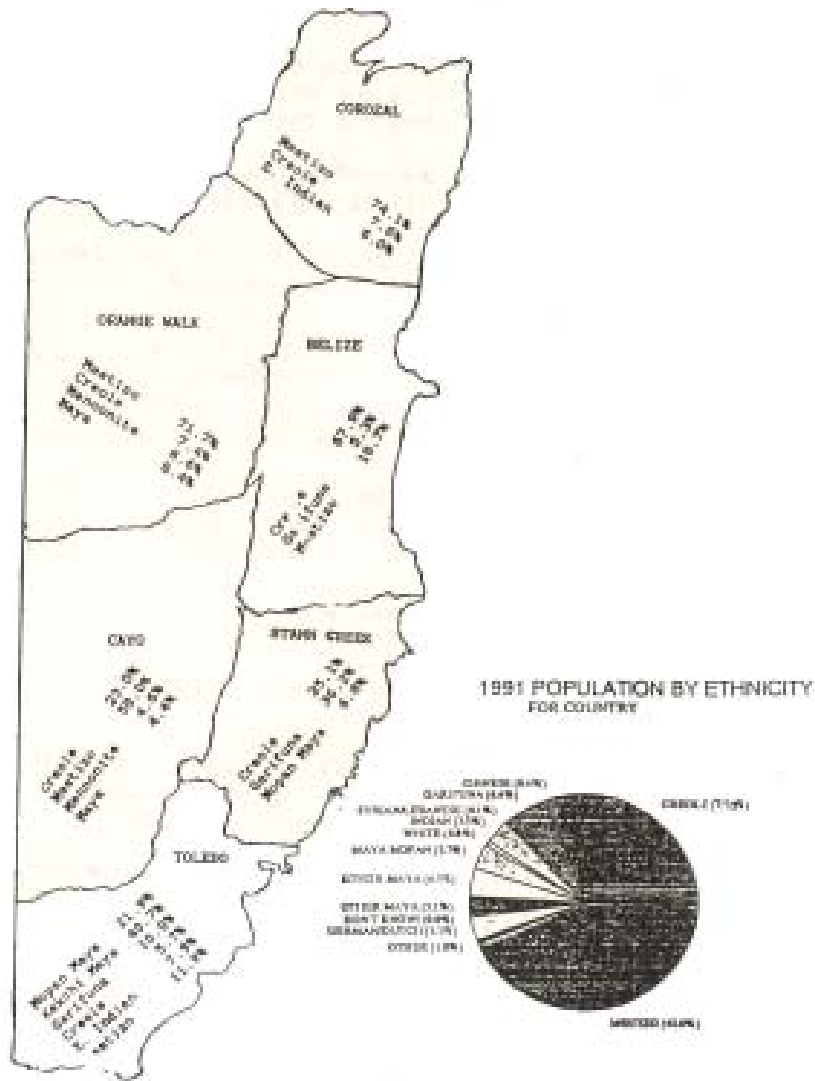
Landmarks in Garifuna History--A Summary

Garifuna history can be summarized into three phases--the period spent in the island of St. Vincent, the period in Central America up to the 1950's, and the period from the 1950's onwards.

In St. Vincent the foundation of the Garifuna culture as we know it today was formed. Briefly, the interactions were between Amerindians and Amerindians, between Amerindians and Europeans, and Between Amerindians and blacks. The first Amerindian groups to travel through the Eastern Caribbean were the Arawaks. About two hundred years before Columbus arrived, Caribs followed the Arawaks raiding them and intermarrying with their women. The blending of the Carib men with the Arawak women resulted in the formation of a dual male/female speech pattern that is still evident in the language today. The Amerindian/European and Amerindian/black interactions provided the outward extension that transformed the original Amerindian base into a heterogeneous Caribbean mix.

BELIZAN POPULATION BY ETHNICITY

Source: Belize (1991 Census)



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Wanáragua dancers



Women doing the abéimahani chant



Hugún Hugún dancer
Also depicting traditional Garifuna attire



Chárikánári dancer