

American Studies Presents

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NEW JERSEY FOLK FESTIVAL

FEATURING

GARIFUNA



Traditions

FREE ADMISSION
RAIN OR SHINE EVENT

SATURDAY, APRIL 27TH 2013
10 AM - 6 PM



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THE NEW JERSEY FOLK FESTIVAL



NJFOLKFEST



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**NEW JERSEY FOLK FESTIVAL
FEATURING GARIFUNA TRADITIONS**

**Rutgers University
American Studies**

**Keynote Address: *I MYRTLE PALACIO*
“On Garifuna Spiritualism”**

**New Jersey
April 27, 2013**

Busutina lun Guririguo.....A pleasant good morning!

The continuity of the Garifuna culture is attached to the tradition of *au búni amürii núni* **or** I for you and you for me. It is a reciprocal relationship as taught at the Dabuyaba within the realm of Garifuna Spirituality. *Au búni amürii núni* has overwhelmingly anchored *Garifunaduáü* as the life style of choice, no matter the geographic location of Garifuna people; **who have** advanced *Garifunaduáü* within national and international spaces and structures. There has been a distinct progressive rise in the consciousness of things Garifuna, as the teachings of the Dabuyaba have propelled Garinagu at home—*Belize, Guatemala, Honduras*—**and** abroad to embrace well-defined actions in the maintenance of **our** culture. This interest is demonstrable in continuing education **and** institutional linkages within Garifuna People's chosen communities. It **is** evident in today's event of a Folk Festival celebrating the Garifuna Culture here at Rutgers University. **Bandi Seremei**. I give thanks first to the *Áharigu*, my Ancestral Spirits; and then to the organizers of this Folk Festival.

Au búni amürii núni re-enforces the obligatory custom of reciprocity whereby, simply put, parents and guardians having raised or *anüriaaha/agüriaaha* their children, who in turn nurture parents in their twilight years. It is a binding, reciprocal relationship in the provision of sustenance to kinfolks, which extends to kin in the Spirit World. At death the soul travels a long journey, passing through *Mulúandu* to the final resting place in *Seiri* or Heaven. During that process, nine days of prayers are said, partly to assist the soul along on its journey to *Seiri*. In making reference to the dead, the terminology used is *uwayan*, meaning “state of being away or no longer physically here”.

Death has a finality that does **not** exist, as the reciprocal relationship with the living and dead continues through the Ancestral Spirits in *Seiri*. Let me highlight, that the Spirits were once our parents, siblings, grandparents, great grandparents; **all** blood relatives in their earthly lives, hence the term Ancestral Spirits. The soul becomes an Ancestral Spirit or *Áhari* after arriving at *Seiri*, **and** is all-seeing, all-powerful, omniscient and omnipresent. Ancestral Spirits have the ability to guide and protect the living in their day to day existence here on earth; and there are four categories, namely, *Áhari*, *Gubida*, *Hiúruha* and *Ebu*.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I **am** describing Garifuna Spiritualism. It is based on lineal kinship and hinges on the cultural practices of nurturing, as a way of re-affirming obligatory social ties. Garifuna Spiritualism is a belief system whose distinguishing feature is the faith that Ancestral Spirits or *Áharigu* have the ability to communicate with the living. Garifuna spiritualism teaches that Ancestral Spirits also protect living family members, in a continuing cycle of parent to child, and child to parent reciprocal and nurturing relationship, even after death.

Communication occurs when the Ancestral Spirit or *Áhari* manifests itself to relatives through dreams or trance called *ónwehani*, usually offering advice or heralding news. Once an *Áhari* reveals itself in trance or *ónwehani*, that *Áhari* is termed a *Gubida*. Not all *Áharigu* become *Gubida*, as not all Ancestral Spirits return in this manner or return at all. The choice of kin by the *Gubida* is subjective, and is dependent on who in the family the *Áhari* may wish to engage or “*play*” with, meaning that the *Áhari* has preferences. While the *Áhari* and *Gubida* provide general guidance and protection to the individual person or family through these dreams, interpretations of serious occurrences are taken to the *Buyei* for his intervention. The *Buyei* is the Spirit Medium who has the capacity to communicate directly with Ancestral Spirits by way of his Spirit Master or *Ebu* and his Spirit

Helpers or *Hiúruha*. This is conducted during either of two communication sessions or séances called *areiraguni* and *aríahani*, and usually takes place in the *Dabuyaba*. The *Dabuyaba* is the Ancestral home where the Spirits of our Ancestors are formally placated.

Ancestral Spirits are reciprocated **and** voluntarily celebrated through various rituals, invariably incorporated into our day-to-day existence. These include the offering of memorial mass, as well as, food and libation at large family gatherings such as weddings; **and** the bathing of the dead. When the obligations to parents or Ancestral Spirits are ignored, then the Ancestral Spirits **may**, as a last resort demand repayment through a formal process called *adügürahani*; to prepare for a *Dügú*. The *Dügú* is a healing ceremony of placation conducted in the *Dabuyaba* under the oversight of the *Buyei*. Consisting of nine rituals, *Dügú* is sacrosanct and rooted in the spiritual and physical health of the Garinagu. The contextual meanings of Garifuna Spiritualism are identified in the nine rituals, the lyrics of its *úgulendu* songs, and the ambience created by the music. The lyrics of the *úgulendu* song for the *Malí*, which is the primary healing ritual, repeatedly call out for *au búni amürü núni*, demonstrating placation and reverence.

Dügú is by far the most elaborate and time consuming process in dispensing of one's commitments to parents and Ancestral Spirits. *Dügú* is an option when all else fail in adhering to obligatory duties as dictated by Garifuna Spiritualism. And therein lies the significance—its very survival or continuity is an indication of people's behaviour and the resultant effect of tradition in re-instituting values of *au búni amürü núni* to correct behaviour.

I Thank you! It is my distinct honour to be here.