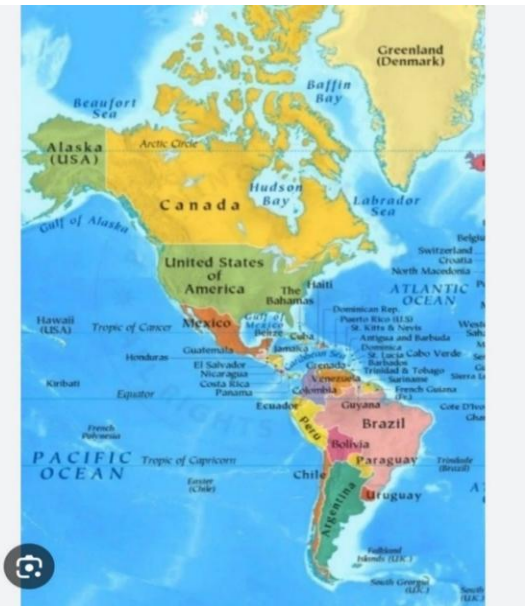
THE GARINAGU ARE OF AFRICAN and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

I. Myrtle Palacio
November 2026

Concepts

The term "Amerindian" is considered dated. It was gradually replaced with the term Native American or Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. Amerindians are the original inhabitants of the North, Central and South America and the Caribbean. They originated from Asia crossing to Alaska via the Bering Strait using a huge mass of land connecting Siberia to Alaska over 12,000 years ago, long before the Colonizers (see Maps). Therefore, Amerindian Peoples—Native American Peoples or Indigenous Peoples are the original inhabitants of North, Central and South America. Among others in North America are Inuit, First Nations, Navajo; in Meso America are Maya and Aztec in Mexico and Central America; and Arawak, Kalinago, Warrau, and Taino in the Caribbean and South America.





From Asia to Alaska to North America ***Through North America to South & Central America and the Caribbean***

The term "Carib" was applied to Native Indians of the Caribbean Islands by Spanish Colonizers as a way of demeaning them. A French Jesuit missionary reported in 1635 that the Peoples of St. Vincent called themselves Kalipuna/Kalinago. Due to linguistic differences of Peoples, Kalinago gradually changed to Garinagu in Honduras. In 1975, the terms Garifuna/Garinagu gained currency and legitimacy when the people themselves permanently replaced the Colonizers' expression "Carib". This was initiated by a group of Garinagu of Belize, a demonstration of decolonization efforts, and of expressing identity in a people's own language.

The legitimization process has since extended to all Garifuna communities in Belize and the Atlantic Coast.

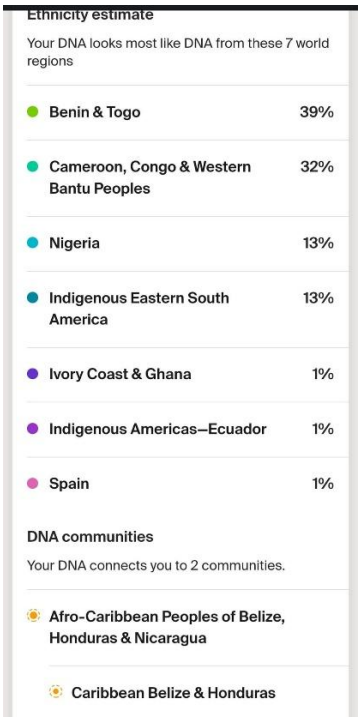
Garifuna is an adjective, a descriptive word; for example, Garifuna People of Garifuna food. *Garifuna* is also used as a noun, in singular form; Garifuna nuguya or I am Garifuna. *Garinagu* is a noun in plural form referring to the people. It does not describe.

Garinagu as Indigenous Peoples—Biologically and Culturally

Kalinago and Arawak Indians who made their way via the Bering Strait (see Map above) settled in the Islands of St. Vincent and Dominica in the Eastern Caribbean, long before the Colonizers. Then entered the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, an economic system devised by Colonizers that enslaved Africans and racialized chattel enslavement of Africans to the Americas. This system was dehumanizing, treating humans as chattel to be bartered, sold and forced to work. Slavery commenced in 1525 and continued for over 300 years until 1866. Some 12.5 million Africans were packed in boats as cargo going through the Middle Passage to the Americas. Some two million died on this journey. Emancipation in this region was August 1, 1823. It is the greatest crime against humanity.

Barbados was the first to be colonized for sugar plantations. Runaway enslaved Africans found a continuous path to nearby St. Vincent. They mated with the Kalinago who had already mixed with the Arawaks. This created a new people on St. Vincent called the Black Kalinago by the mid-1600s. Those who had not yet mixed were called Yellow Kalinago. The British Colonizers eventually dominated the Island of St. Vincent in 1796, after years of skirmishes and a war with the Kalinago. They forcibly removed the Kalinago from St. Vincent and dumped them on the Island of Roatan; and several hundred died in the process. Within 3 months of their arrival to Roatan, about 75% moved to Trujillo, and from there made homesteads along the coast including Belize. Through the years the pronunciation of Kalinago gradually changed to Garinagu.

To reiterate, Garinagu are a mixture through interethnic mating of Enslaved Africans and two Amerindian/Indigenous Peoples, Arawak and Kalinago. So that biologically and culturally they are of both African Peoples and Amerindian/Indigenous Peoples. Below is a DNA of a Belizean Garifuna, which demonstrates this fact.



The diagram on the left is the DNA result of a sibling.

The DNA's outcome states that she is 85% of 8 Peoples of Africa—Benin & Togo, Cameroon, Congo, Western Bantu, Nigeria, Ivory Coast & Ghana. She is also 14% of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern South America and Equador. She is biologically of Indigenous and African Peoples.

This DNA result is common to: Afro-Caribbean Peoples of Belize, Honduras and Nicaragua.

Ameridian culture is evident in some of the symbols of the Garifuna culture still practiced today. The cassava baking process which is similar to the Amerindian Peoples of Guyana is one example.

Finally, one has the right to accept as theirs ALL of the Peoples they come from (Karen Blue: 1981).

Source:

The Primer On The People Called GARIFUNA: The Things you have always wanted to know!, I. Myrtle Palacio July 2025

Adugurahani—A Walk Through Garifuna Spirituality, I Myrtle Palacio, June 2011

Redefining Ethnicity—The Experience of the Garifuna and Creole in Postindependent Belize, I Myrtle Palacio, M. Sc. Thesis 1995