

Life on St. Vincent

On St. Vincent, some of the Kalinago were transported to Trinidad after the British Government had been convinced to do so by the Planters, even though Governor Seaton believed that they had not acted against the British in the war. French sources indicate that some amongst the Kalinago acted with the Garinagu, but the British sources overwhelmingly decided that this was not the case. One account by a French eyewitness, who claims to have spent three months amongst the Kalinago, recounts some fantastical events which are otherwise impossible to verify, which brings the source into question. A Kalinago man, named Gabriel, successfully petitioned to allow himself and others to settle at Sandy Bay. However, after the eruption of La Soufrière volcano in 1812, many of the Kalinago emigrated to Trinidad. Some Garinagu also remained on the island, although an Act passed in June 1804 ruled that they were no longer entitled to the lands agreed by the 1773 Treaty, and in 1805 those that remained were given a pardon. The same Act of Pardon gave them lands around Morne Ronde on the Northwest coast of the island, where there is still a locale called Carib Settlement. Many later settled around Sandy Bay, and in the town of Grieggs; tradition holds they are descended from those Garinagu who remained after the Second Carib War. However, over time, the Garinagu and Kalinago communities of St. Vincent largely merged into one Carib community.

The next major trial to affect the remaining Kalinago and Garinagu populations on St. Vincent was the eruption of La Soufrière on 6th May 1902, the first time it had erupted since 1812. It occurred just two days before the eruption of Mont Pelée on Martinique. The eruption went on for several days. Naturally the devastation in the north of the island, near the volcano, was extreme, and it was reported as being worse on the eastern side of the island where the Carib population resided.



La Soufrière shortly after the 1902 eruption

In total, it appears that a third of the island was devastated. It was initially reported that the eruption caused the deaths of over 2,000 people, but this figure was later revised to 1,327. The vast majority of them were from the Carib population. Indeed, in the early reports of the disaster, it was feared that the entirety of the Vincentian Carib population had been annihilated but some did survive, with reports of some 2,000 people escaping the Carib settlements and reaching Kingstown with other refugees.

The affect of the eruption on the surrounding area was devastating. Some reports listed almost all vegetation as being destroyed, ash being two feet deep, and lava having flowed over the landscape. Bodies of both humans and livestock killed in the eruption were left unburied for days until they could be reached under the deadly conditions. The eruption of Mont Pelée saw the destruction of the town of Saint-Pierre and the death of over 29,000 people in the space of a few minutes. Despite the death and destruction caused by the 1902 eruption and the devastation caused by the 2021 eruption, the Caribs of St. Vincent continue to survive on the island to this day.