

# The Modern Era

Today there are Garinagu communities located all over the world, with some 300,000 to 400,000 estimated globally as of 2006. Honduras remains the largest community, with around 200,000, whilst Belize is home to around 24,000. Sizeable communities are also found in America, amounting to 125,000, although it is difficult to give an accurate figure, in places such as Houston, New Orleans and especially New York. The migrant communities remitted money to their families back home, supporting the development of the Garinagu community in Central America. Some Garinagu also now live in Britain, particularly in and around High Wycombe, which has a large Vincentian community.



The location of large Garinagu communities in the Americas

Descendants of the Garinagu and the Kalinago also continue to live in St. Vincent, particularly in and around Sandy Bay in the north of the island. It is unclear how many of their number there are in St. Vincent today, but it was estimated in the 1980s that there were between 1,100 and 2,000. Today, Kalinago genes count for about 20% of the Garinagu Genome, despite the community's long separation from St. Vincent.

Although the Garinagu culture has largely faded amongst their descendants on St. Vincent, the exiles have maintained their language, music, food and dance, as well as the oral history of their people. The language, music and dance of the Garinagu was first recognised by UNESCO



Garinagu dancers

photo by maisa\_nyc via Creative Commons

in 2001, and in 2008 was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Garinagu music carries both African and Arawak elements, with the most notable instrument used being the garawoun, a drum, which plays a role in both Garinagu spiritual practices and their secular music. The Garawoun and other drums are at the heart of all Garinagu music, and are traditionally made by hollowing out the trunks of hardwood trees such as Mahogany or Cedar, burning out the interior and then chiselling the remains to reach the desired shape. There

are usually two drums in Garinagu songs, the *segunda* (providing the bass) and *primero* (providing the treble). The Segunda drummer maintains a constant rhythm through the song, thus providing the beat, whilst the Primero produces faster rhythms.

The most notable style of Garinagu music is the *Punta*. *Punta* is usually, like most Garinagu music, accompanied by dances known as *hunguhungu* and *chumba*, with one couple encircled by other dancers. These traditional styles of dance are said to be based on the mating dance between a cockerel and hen. The dancers on the outside sing the song, which involves patterns such as call and response. For the dancers in the middle, the focus is on movements of the hips, with the upper body remaining quite still. A modern version of *Punta*, *Punta rock*, was developed in the 1980s and 90s, which has adopted modern instruments such as the bass guitar and synthesizers, bringing the traditions to a modern audience.



Garinagu drummers in Nicaragua  
photo by Alexander Schimmeck  
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A Wanaragua dancer with drummers  
photo by Francesco Pesciarelli  
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Other notable dances include the *Wanaragua* (meaning mask), which is traditionally performed during the Christmas holidays, and is closely related to the wider Caribbean tradition of *Jonkannu*. This has its origins in mocking the slave owners, so dancers wear pink coloured masks, often with a moustache drawn on it. It is traditionally performed by men, and it is notable that dancers are not led by the rhythm of the drums, but instead it is the dancers that lead the drummers, dictating the rhythm of the music by the speed of their dancing.

The Garinagu have also a distinct style of cooking, developed from living on the coasts of Central America. Garinagu cuisine relies heavily on coconut, fish, cassava, plantains, breadfruit, beans and other vegetables. Coconut is used extensively, with both its oil used for frying, its milk used in soups, stews and making breads, and its flesh in a variety of other recipes, including sweets. The quintessential Garinagu dish is *hudutu*. It is a fish stew, made with a coconut milk base, that is seasoned with black pepper, chicken bouillon, adobo, cilantro, cumin, green peppers, basil and garlic. The fish is lightly browned in coconut oil, before being added to the soup. It is then traditionally served alongside mashed plantains.

Although originally created in 1941 by civil rights activist Thomas Vincent Ramos, in 1977, Settlement Day was established on 19<sup>th</sup> November as a National Holiday in Belize to commemorate the arrival of the Garifuna communities in the country and the contributions that they have made to Belizean history and culture. As part of the day, there is celebration of Garinagu food and dance, as well as recreations of the arrival of the Garinagu in canoes.



Like the Caribs of Dominica, the Garinagu culture provides a direct link with the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. Similarly the African heritage of the Garinagu, as with the Maroons of Jamaica, provides an uninterrupted insight into African cultures that evolved in response to the dislocation of these peoples and their interaction with other cultures that were imposed upon them by necessity in the Caribbean.

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. From this premise, we may argue that the unique Garinagu people embody man's desire to survive and were invented by that most powerful of human instincts.



A Carib (Garinagu) family on St. Vincent  
by Agostino Brunias