

The exile of the Garinagu

The terms of surrender given by the British promised that the Garinagu were to be sent *“to a good country, where there is plenty of water, and a good soil”*. The vast majority of the Garinagu were removed from St. Vincent to the nearby island of Baliceaux in 1796, where they remained for several months before they were transported to the island of Roatàn off the Central American Coast in early 1797. Baliceaux, a small island only 33 kilometres from Kingstown, was chosen as a temporary location due to its proximity.



However, on Baliceaux they faced overcrowding, disease and poor supplies of food and water. The disease, possibly typhus or yellow fever, seems to have been brought by the last of the Garinagu that surrendered and were shipped to the island, where it proceeded to run rampant through the population; some British soldiers on the island also succumbed. Out of the 4,195 that were exiled to Baliceaux, there were only 2,248 left by the time they were transported to Roatàn. The Garinagu believed that the flour they were provided with to make bread had been poisoned with lime.

The majority of the Garinagu landed on Roatàn on 12th April 1797, where they were given six months' supplies, but much of these provisions had been damaged by saltwater when being unloaded, and were insufficient to last until the harvest. Amongst those who made it to Roatàn, were Chatoyer's brother Du Valleé, one of Chatoyer's sons, and Chatoyer's daughter, Gulisi. On the way to Roatàn, one of the transport ships was captured by the Spanish and taken to the nearby Spanish city of Trujillo on the Honduran Coast. The British attacked Trujillo in late April and recaptured the transport, taking the Garinagu aboard to Roatàn. Shortly after their arrival on Roatàn, they were approached by the Spanish, who viewed the Garinagu's presence with hostility, the island having been captured from the Spanish by the British. The Spanish at first were going to attack the new arrivals, but, seeing that the Garinagu were not British, adopted a new approach.

The Trujillo colony was not thriving, many of the original Spanish settlers having perished. The Spanish therefore offered to assist the Garinagu if they accepted Spanish authority. Alliance with the Spanish offered the opportunity of food rations to replace the inadequate and damaged supplies that the British had left. Thus, the Garinagu accepted, and the Spanish transported them to the mainland, where they initially settled in remote villages, as they had in St. Vincent, some distance from the Spanish communities. In addition to working as labourers on Royal projects in the colony, they were welcomed



as members of the now-undermanned Spanish militia, where their experience with firearms and fierceness in battle were particularly valued.

The Garinagu became an integral part of the Trujillo economy, primarily through agriculture, growing a variety of crops, including cassava, maize and rice, as well as raising chickens and pigs. By 1813, they were almost the exclusive producers in the agricultural sector of the colony. They also fished, selling the surplus at market, and became a mainstay of the timber industry, cutting logwood and mahogany. Many would also become sailors (and indeed smugglers) and their travels helped to establish Garinagu communities in ports in the USA, including New Orleans and New York, particularly when the South American Banana trade was at its height in the early 20th century.

The Garinagu's population rapidly increased, with as many as 500 to 600 children being born in their first year in Central America. By 1821, they comprised 64% of the population of the city of Trujillo and the nine towns that together formed the colony. This led to a certain amount of population pressure, which led to migration along the coast and inland.

The Garinagu were not immune to the political situation in Central America, namely the Declaration of Independence from Spain in 1821, the brief rule of the Mexican Empire in 1822, the establishment of the Federal Republic of Central America in 1823 and the relationships and wars between its constituent members. Ultimately, Trujillo changed hands between Guatemala and Honduras. The Garinagu formed a part of the Spanish Royalist forces in the early years of this period.

Later, the tribe also formed part of the counter-revolutions against the forces of President Francisco Morazán of the Federal Republic of Central America, who had ousted President Manuel José Arce. It was in this period of political upheaval that many Garinagu travelled to and settled in what is now Belize, including Gulisi, Chatoyer's daughter. The oral history passed down from Gulisi recounts that she was harassed by the Spanish authorities, who believed she was a spy, and left after an incident in which she was almost killed.



Manuel Arce

Although the Garinagu who were exiled from St. Vincent retained much of their culture, including their unique language, these upheavals nevertheless resulted in significant cultural change. Whilst the French missionaries of the late 17th century had failed to convert the Garinagu to Roman Catholicism, in Central America they overwhelmingly converted to the faith. They also integrated with other West Indians, although they still largely married other Garinagu. For a time, there did appear to be animosity between the Creole population of Belize and the Garinagu, which has been explained by some scholars as resulting from the poor relations between the slave population and the Garinagu at the end of the 18th century on St. Vincent, and how the Ranger Corps was used to great effect against the Garinagu.



William Brown

The wider world was not ignorant of what had transpired on St. Vincent. In 1822, the story inspired William Alexander Brown, also known as William Henry Brown. Born in the West Indies, William Brown was America's first black playwright and theatre producer who, after settling on Thompson Street, New York in 1816, composed a play, entitled *The Drama of King Shotaway, founded on Facts taken from the Insurrection of the Caravs on the Island of St Vincent, written from Experience by Mr. Brown.*

It is the first play that we know Brown to have written, although evidence suggests that he wrote earlier works that have now been lost. There is even some evidence to suggest that he was illiterate; he made his mark on various documents rather than signed his name, but that does not preclude him

from having dictated his work to others, which may explain the phonetic spellings of Chatoyer and Carib in the title of the play, nor have prevented him from directing the performance. Some have theorised that it was not written down at all, and it was largely improvised under Brown's guidance. The play was performed at the African Grove Theatre in Lower Manhattan, which not only staged other original plays, but also renditions of Shakespeare with an all-black cast, otherwise unheard of at that time.

Although details of the play survive, the script did not. It is unclear how William Brown had experience of the war on St. Vincent, and he must have been young, possibly as young as 5 years old, when it occurred. It is unknown from where in the West Indies he originally hailed. Furthermore, early references to the play indicate that it related to events on San Domingo rather than St. Vincent, again calling into question Brown's direct experience of the conflict. What is clear is that the play was an attempt to record a revolt by the indigenous and slave populations of the Caribbean, and likely regarded as an inspiration to a black American audience, given the social tensions of North America at the time.

Before his career in theatre, it is known that Brown was employed as a ship's steward on the transatlantic crossing between Liverpool and New York, and it is possible that he learned of the Carib wars during his time at sea, maybe meeting some of the participants, which might possibly explain the earlier confusion with San Domingo. The play was performed at the African Grove Theatre in Lower Manhattan, alongside a repertoire of Shakespeare and other works by Brown. Nevertheless, *The Drama of King Shotaway* was one of the first plays, written by a black playwright, performed by black artists in America for an all black audience.



The African Grove Theatre