

Belize Cultural Celebrations Series

YURUMEIN



In 1635, a Spanish ship carrying enslaved Africans was wrecked off the coast of the Caribbean Island of St. Vincent. Survivors escaped slavery and made their way to the island where they lived and settled in the community of Calinago, among the indigenous Arawak and Carib Indians. This intermingling resulted in the emergence of the Garinagu culture and language.

1763, the British invaded the island resulting in a series of conflict in which the Garinagu resisted British control.



The Garinagu led by Paramount Chief, Joseph Chatoyer, fought fiercely to retain control over their land.

In the final battle against the British, Chatoyer was assassinated on March 14th, 1795.



March 14th is celebrated as National Heroes Day in St. Vincent and the Grenadines on which occasion Chatoyer is honored.

This was followed by the imprisonment of 5080 Garinagu men, women and children from the neighboring barren island of Baliceaux, from July 1796 until March 11th, 1797. Many perished from disease and starvation.

Those who survived were then exiled to the British islands of Roatan, Honduras. The Garinagu then migrated to mainland Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Belize.

According to some accounts, the Garinagu started to arrive in Belize from as early as 1802.

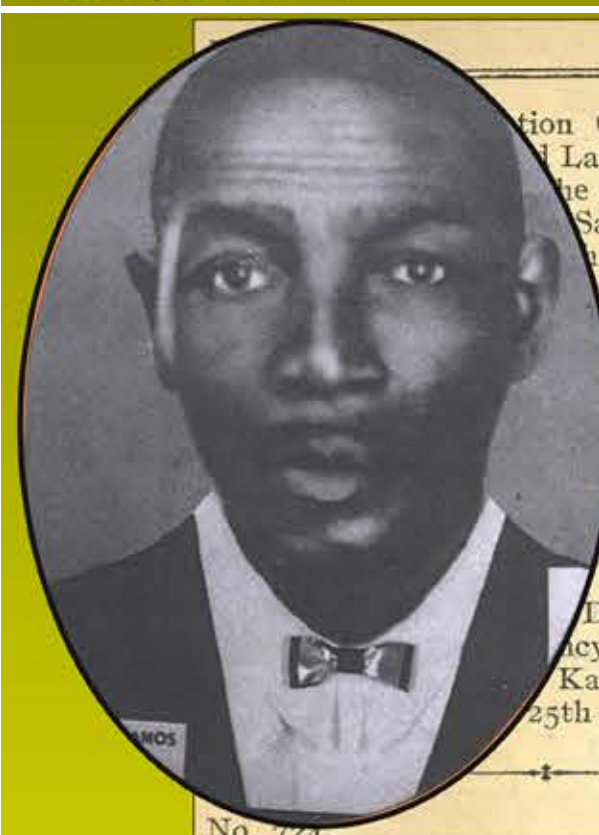


Escaping political persecution in Honduras, Alejo Beni requested permission in 1823 from British Authorities to have Garinagu families settle in Belize (British Honduras).



After several requests by Alejo Beni, permission was granted for the Garinagu to settle south of the Sibun River. On November 19th, 1823, several families arrived and established the community that is today known as Dangriga.

This arrival to Belizean shores is commemorated each year on that date as Garifuna Settlement Day, and begins with Yurumein or the Re-enactment of this historic journey from Honduras to Belize.



BRITISH HONDURAS GAZETTE

No. 726.

M.P. 1508/43.

Belize, 13th November, 1943.

PUBLIC AND BANK HOLIDAY IN THE DISTRICT OF STANN CREEK.

It is hereby notified that, under the provisions of the Public and Bank Holidays Ordinance, Chapter 113 of the Consolidated Laws, 1924, His Excellency the Governor has appointed Friday the 19th day of November, 1943, to be observed as a public and bank holiday in the District of Stann Creek in commemoration of Stann Creek Settlement Day.

By Command.

A. WOLFFSOHN,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

Thomas Vincent Ramos envisioned the need for the recognition of the Garinagu and along with Mateo Avaloy and C.S. Bengushe, wrote an official letter to the District Commissioner requesting that the November 19th be celebrated as a Public and Bank Holiday.

The celebrations began in 1941 and in 1943, the holiday was officially observed Dangriga. In 1977, it became a national holiday and the name was officially changed to Garifuna Settlement Day.

Originally Garifuna Settlement Day was known as Carib Disembarkment Day.



Yurumein commences in the early morning of November 19th and recreates the harsh conditions faced during the ancestors' journey. Boats or doreys are filled with crops such as cassava, plantain and sugar cane, that were brought by the ancestors. Beni's request to the British Authorities is dramatized with actors portraying various historical figures.



Following the re-enactment, the actors, community and visitors are led by the Garifuna flag in a lively procession to the church for a Mass of Thanksgiving.

Today, Garifuna Settlement Day has been expanded into a month long series of activities highlighting the Garifuna culture. Yurumein remains at the heart of the celebrations and has become a part of the nation's history and identity.

On May 18, 2001 UNESCO proclaimed the Garifuna Language, Music and Dance a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. In 2008, these elements were inscribed as part of UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

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