

Completing the Circle:

The Garifuna Journeys from Belize to Yurumein

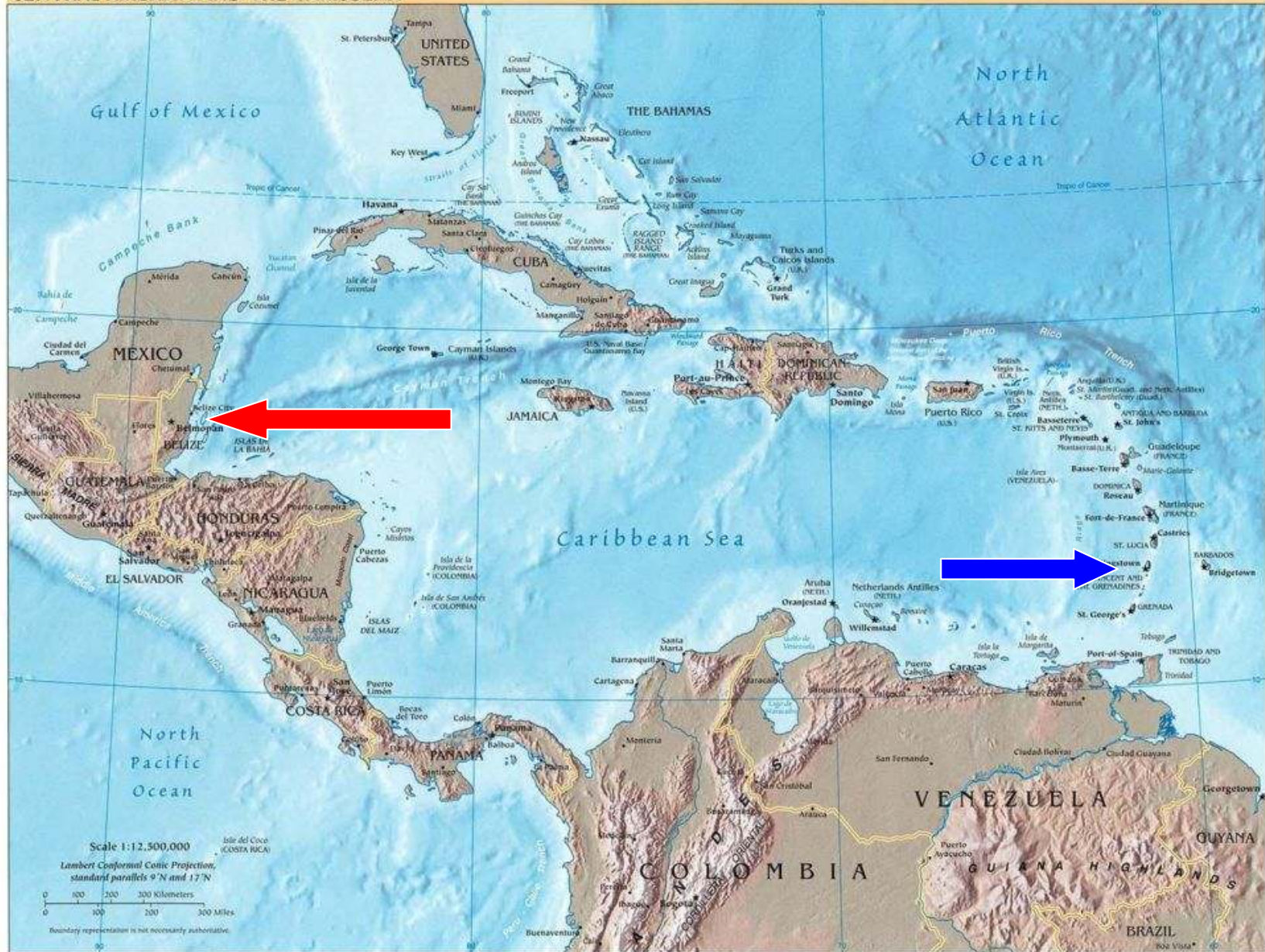
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The Project

CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



Garifuna History

Garifuna Chief Chatoyer on
St. Vincent

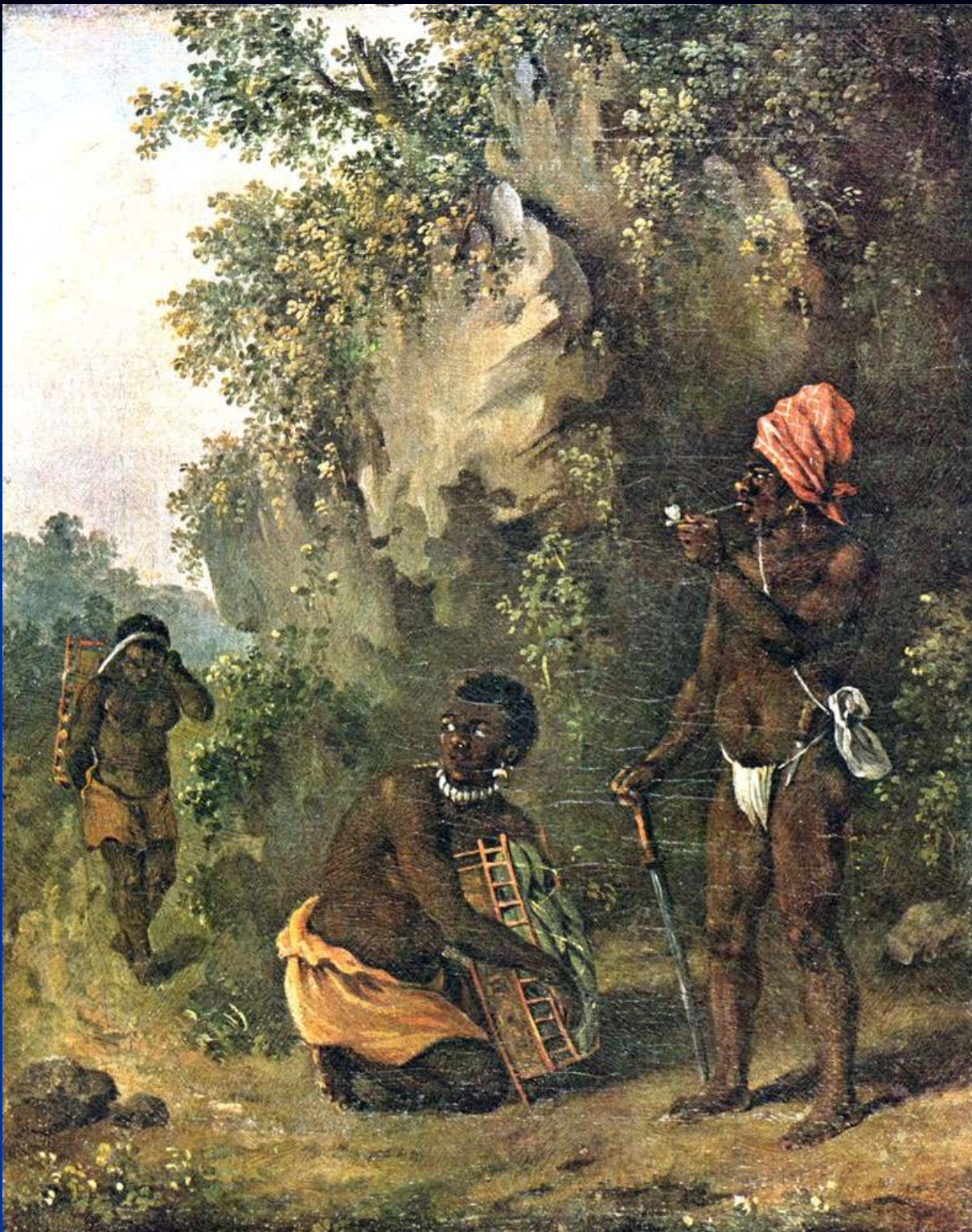


Photo Courtesy of
Lenox Honeychurch

War with the British



Pacification with Maroon Negroes. Print. In Bryan Edwards' *History Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies*, 1801, 1818, 1819, T. Miller Publ. Cheapside, London.

Exile to Balliceaux



Those Allowed to Remain

- 102 Garifuna captives returned to St. Vincent. They had lighter skin and were considered less dangerous.
- Present population of Garifuna descendants number approximately 2,500. (US Dept. of State 2006)
- No traces of Garifuna culture are present in ST. Vincent today.

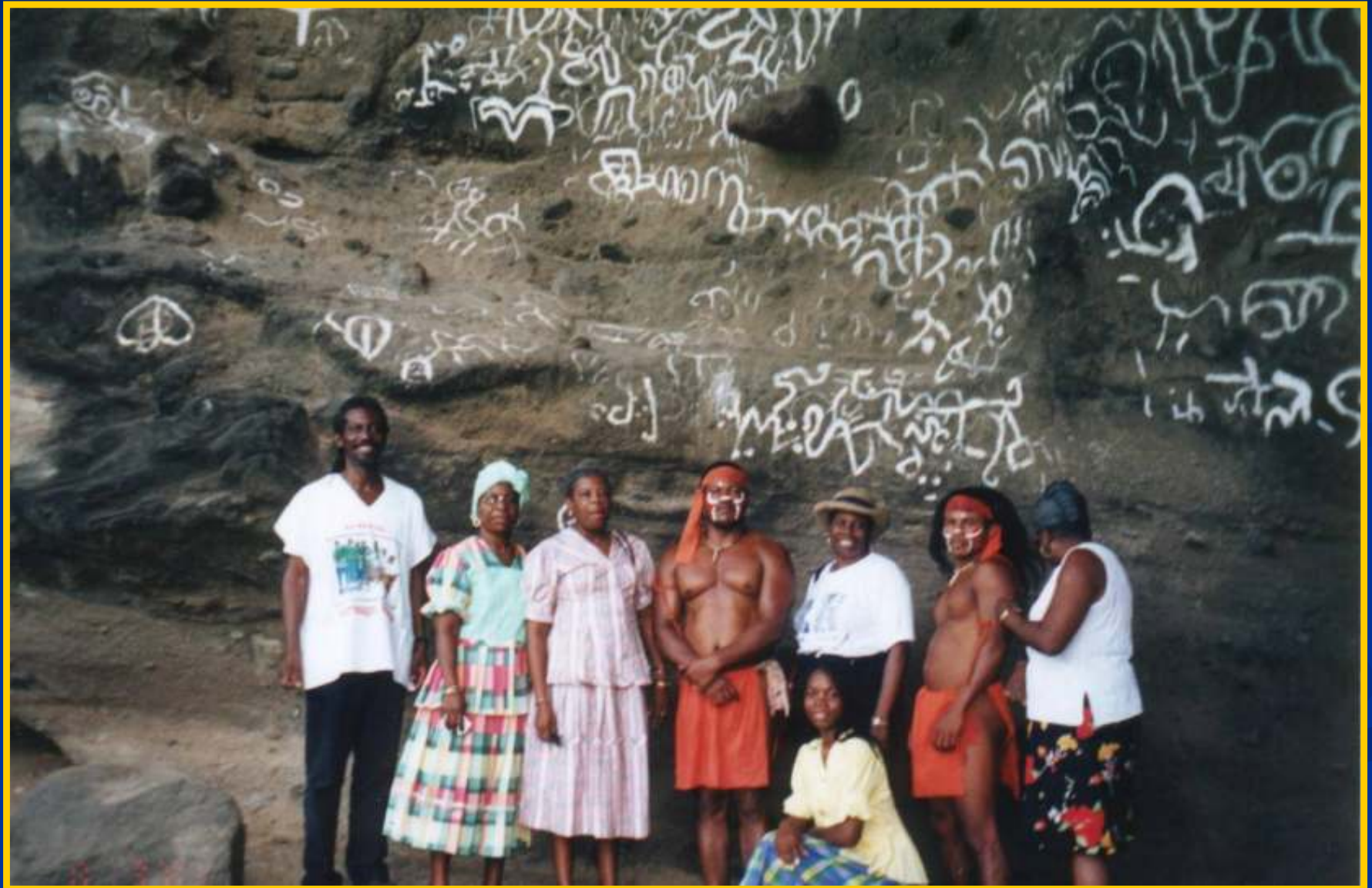
Exile to Central America



Arrival in Honduras



The Garifuna Return to Yurumein



The Garifuna return to Yurumein



Performing the Mali



Garifuna Philosophy on Relationships

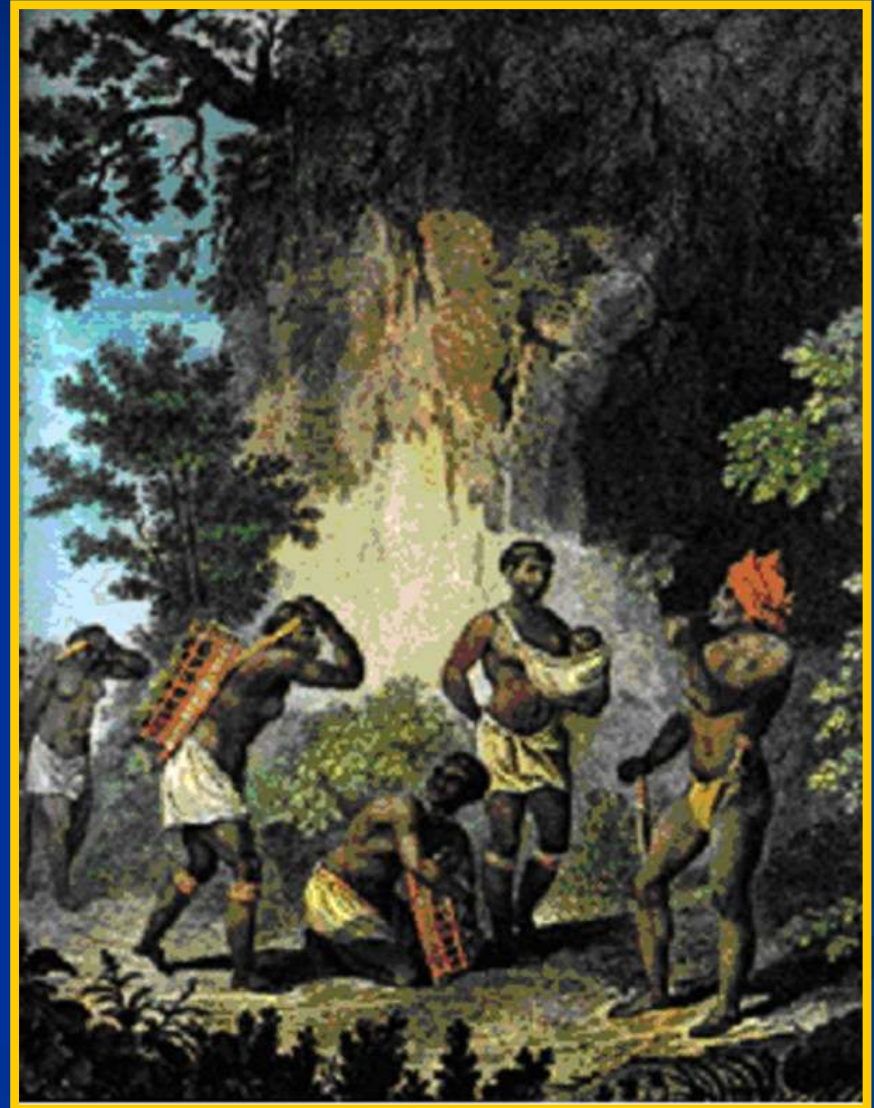
- Harmony must exist in physical relationships.
 - Natural environment
 - Cassava production (Flores 2002)
- Harmony must exist in Social and Spiritual
 - *By spiritual there is also our relationship with our ancestors and those who are yet to come. The past, present and future life are all one.*
 - *Au bun, amiürü nu. [I for you and you for me]*
(Personal Communication 2007)

Research Question

“What importance does St. Vincent have for the Garifuna people today and why have they begun to make trips back to the island?”

Significance of the Study

- No discussion of spiritual significance of St. Vincent in the Garifuna literature.
- No discussion of Garifuna pilgrimages to St. Vincent.



What is a Pilgrimage?

- Journey of fellowship away from the everyday (Turner 1969).
- Journey to a valued ideal (Morinis 1992).
- “Realm of competing discourses,” (Saltnow and Eade 1990).

Types of Pilgrimages

Morinis (1992)

- Initiatory
- Normative
- Wandering
- Instrumental
- Obligatory
 - “It’s a must do.”
 - “It’s like a Muslim traveling to Mecca.”
- Devotional
 - “The spirits are still there and we did a Mali for them.”
 - “We gave offerings of food we know our ancestors would like.”

Methodology

1995 Trip		
	# of Travelers	# of Travelers Interviewed
Male	7	5
Female	9	6
Total	16	11

2002 Trip		
	# of Travelers	# of Travelers Interviewed
Male	3	1
Female	12	5
Total	15	6

Total of Combined Trips		
	Total Travelers	Total Interviewed
Total	31	17

Interview Sites July 2006



“Could you tell me why you went to St. Vincent?”

Theme	# of Respondents
Spiritual Reasons/Ancestors	13
History	13
Motherland	6
Vacation	2
Demonstrate Culture	1

- *I went because of the connection. I needed to feel complete.*
- *I had always wanted to go because our ancestors came from there. My spirit had an affinity to go.*
- *I wanted to get to know my roots. I had a 360 degree feeling about it, like I had completed the circle.*

“Are the Garifuna called to make pilgrimages to St. Vincent?”

Response	# of Respondents
Yes	12
No	4
I don't Know	1
No Response	0

- *Yes, it's like the Muslim call to Mecca.*
- *In Garifuna culture, it's part of our ultimate dreams. It's a must do.*
- *There's something missing if you haven't had a chance to go.*

“Could you tell me about the spiritual connection with St. Vincent?”

Response	# of Respondents
Yes	16
No	1

Theme	# of Respondents
Ancestral Spirits	15
Motherland	1

- *We had a Mali and you felt a connection to the ancestors.*
- *We know every Garifuna is linked. The spirits are still there at Balliceaux.*
- *We were torn fro the motherland and never stopped grieving. The umbilical cord had never been torn.*

“Do you believe that St. Vincent is a source of power for the Garifuna?”

Response	# of Respondents
Yes	17
No	0
I don't Know	0
No Response	0

- *It renews your spirituality. It renews life.*
- *Going and feeling those spirits gives deeper sense of what that means.*
- *It gives an awareness of identity of self, of who you are.*

“Could you tell me if there are any sacred sites on St. Vincent?”

Response	# of Respondents
Yes	16
No	1

Theme	# of Respondents
Balliceaux	16
Dorsetshire Hill	5

- *Definitely Balliceaux. I consider it sacred.*
- *Balliceaux, for the reason that a lot of suffering occurred for our people.*
- *Balliceaux. It's burial ground. Their spirits are there.*
- *The spot where Chief Chatoyer died is sacred.*

“Is the journey to St. Vincent considered sacred one?”

Response	# of Respondents
Yes	16
No	0
I don't Know	1
No Response	0

- *Not only sacred, but obligatory.*
- *It's the main reason I went. It's a return to the motherland.*
- *Yes, it gives you time to reflect, to understand, and to prepare and focus on what you'll receive there.*

“Could you tell me what benefits you obtained from the trip?”

Theme	# of Respondents
Deeper spiritual connection	10
Sense of healing or peace	10
Communicated with ancestors	6
Learned more about history	2
Strengthened identity	1

- *The dance and ceremony were enriching.*
- *It was a matter of closure.*
- *The benefits are intangible.*
- *I felt fulfilled going to the land of my ancestors.*
- *A sense of peace having been to the homeland.*

Seiri

- “*Seiri* is like a heaven where we came from and where we go back to when we die. If it were a physical place, it would be like *Yurumein*.” (Personal Communication 2006)
- One of the important aspects of the Dugu ritual, is that the ancestors are coming from a merged St. Vincent-*Seiri* (Foster 2005).



Ancestral Spirits

“You felt a connection to the ancestors. Most of us felt that was there and present, calling [Chatoyer’s] spirit there to honor him and ask him to continue to be with us, watch us, and guide us on our journey.”

(Personal Communication 2006)



Origin Place

- “I wanted to walk where my ancestors walked,”

(Personal Communication 2006).

- “I wanted to put my feet on the soil and breathe the air,”

(Personal Communication 2006).

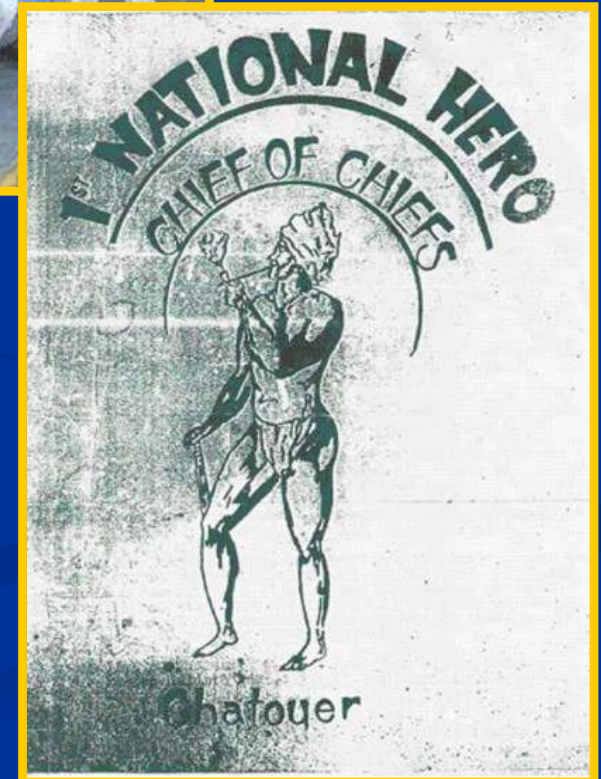


Au bun, amürü nu.

I for you and you for me.

Straying from the practice of this principle is what generates disharmony and is frowned upon by the ancestors. How can Garifuna pilgrims honor the memory of the ancestors; how can they show respect for the sacred ground, and not practice the principle that, perhaps more than anything else, made it possible for them to survive Balliceaux and the genocidal intention that resulted in exile? (Personal Communication 2007).

Conclusions



New Developments

- Another pilgrimage from Belize March 29, 2007
- Land set aside for a memorial at Balliceaux



References

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