



# **The Black Carib Wars: Freedom, Survival, and the Making of the Garifuna (Caribbean Studies Series)**

*Christopher Taylor*

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In *The Black Carib Wars*, author Christopher Taylor offers the fullest, most thoroughly researched history of the Garifuna people of St. Vincent, and their uneasy conflicts and alliances with Great Britain and France. The Garifuna--whose descendants were native Carib Indians, Arawaks and West African slaves brought to the Caribbean--were free citizens of St. Vincent. Beginning in the mid-1700s, they clashed with a number of colonial powers who claimed ownership of the island and its people. Upon the Garifuna's eventual defeat by the British in 1796, the people were dispersed to Central America. Today, roughly 600,000 descendants of the Garifuna live in Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, Nicaragua, the United States, and Canada.

The Garifuna--called "Black Caribs" by the British to distinguish them from other groups of unintegrated Caribs--speak a language and live a culture that directly descends from natives of the Caribbean at the time of Columbus. Thus, the Garifuna heritage is one of the oldest and strongest links historians have to the region before European colonialism.

The French, the first white people to live on St Vincent, attempted to subdue the Black Caribs but eventually developed an alliance with them. When the Treaty of Paris ostensibly handed St. Vincent to the British crown in 1763, the British clashed with the Black Caribs but, like the French, eventually formed another treaty. This cycle of attempted colonialism of St. Vincent by France and England alternately would continue for three decades. After repeated conflict and desperate measures by the European powers, the Garifuna were forced to surrender.

In March 1797 the last survivors were loaded on to British ships and deported to the island of Roatán hundreds of miles away in the bay of Honduras. A little over 2,000 men, women and children were all that were left--perhaps a fifth of the Black Carib population of just two years earlier. It was a cataclysm. But the Black Caribs--the Garifuna in their own language--survived and their descendants number in the hundreds of thousands.

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