

**The History and Culture of  
Bay Islanders and North Coast English Speakers  
of Honduras**

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## **Table of Contents**

Introduction

The Arrival of English Speakers in Honduras

The Work of English Speakers in the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Their Population and Ethnic Organization

Their Language and the Bilingual-Intercultural Education Project

Religion and Honduran English speakers

Music and Dance

Clothes and Crafts

Traditional Architecture of Bay Islanders and North Coast English speakers

Bay Islands Oral Literature

Food & Agriculture of the Bay Islanders

Medicinal Plants

Meat and other Protein Sources in Bay Islands Foods

Land and Fishing Rights Problems

Bibliography

## Introduction

In Honduras there are two Afro-Caribbean ethnic groups. One group is the Garifunas and the other is Bay Islanders or as they call themselves, the English speakers of Honduras (“los ingleses” in Spanish).

Most English speakers are Black, however, there is also a number of white Bay Islanders. In Honduras the whites are called “caracoles” (Conchs). The Blacks and the Whites are often interrelated. The majority of Honduran English speakers live in the Bay Islands, but some parts of the Honduran North Coast such as La Ceiba and Puerto Cortes also have a fair number of people whose native language is English.

English speakers are called “ingleses”, because their native language is English. The majority are not the descendants of the English from England. Instead the majority are descendants of people who were slaves in Jamaica, Belize, and Grand Cayman. Some English speakers were brought to Honduras as slaves, especially in the Mosquitia where slavery existed until 1843, but the overwhelming majority immigrated as free people after slavery had ended in their places of origin.

When a tourist visits the Bay Islands or North Coast towns like La Ceiba, they see generally only the present—good highway connections, modern stores, tourists, electricity, taxis, lots of Spanish speakers, garbage on the ground in front of signs that say Do not put garbage here L500 fine. All of this is new, within the last 40 years, much within the last 15 years.

Long time Bay Islands residents see in their mind’s eye other times on top of this one. They remember a time when almost everyone spoke in Islands. They remember current beach hangouts like West End as coconut plantations and places to gather wild cocoplums. As they see the garbage, they remember when everyone cleaned and burned garbage on their patio every Saturday. Foods and drinks came from home without plastic. Older people remember horses in West End corrals and horse races from Sandy By Bay to Coxen where taxis and little buses zoom now. Instead of discos, the only music that was heard was that the Bay Islander made themselves.

North Coast English speakers remember other times, too. These banana towns got up to the rhythm of the workers going to work in the banana company’s factories for example La Blanquita, Cervecería Hondureña, and La Standard, now all belonging to Dole. Saturday was marked by trains that brought workers in from the banana camps to do their shopping in the larger port towns and La Lima. Memories of school included buses for the children of banana camp workers coming into town to study. Many of these became great professionals in Honduras. There were communities of English speakers whose weeks revolved around working for banana companies, English speaking churches and bilingual schools.

Besides memories of changes, residents see a spiritual realm, not known to the uninformed tourist. The countryside has memories of ghosts, zombies, witches, and

pirates. The reader is invited to try to develop a local resident's vision of this landscape populated with memories and spirits that make the Bay Islands and the North Coast different from just another tourist resort.

### **The Arrival of English Speakers in Honduras**

There have been English speakers in Honduras since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when European Englishmen arrived to establish a place where they could be in commercial contact with the Miskito Indians near Cabo Gracias a Dios. (Naylor, 1989)

Their presence was variable during the colonial period. English pirates used the Islands as a base for supplying and refitting their ships, and in 1612 erected fortifications. The Spanish tried to force the pirates away from the Islands. The Spanish evacuated the Indians away from the Bay Islands around 1645, leaving it as a no man's land. In 1762 England took forceable occupation and fortified them. The English managed to have a strong presence in the Bay Islands in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. (Isaguirre et al., 2003)

The English managed to gain the confidence of the Miskito king. This permitted them to export first logwood (palo de Campeche) which was used to fix dyes in the British textile industry. Later they brought gangs of black slaves to work with the Miskito Indians to cut Honduran mahogany (caoba) for furniture making. Miskito Indians and mostly English speaking Blacks were the principal source of labor for this important economic activity on the North Coast. A few other articles were exported such as tortoise shells and animal skins.

### **Effects on Miskito Indians**

The Miskitos are "sambos"—the mixture of Indians with Blacks. The first Black that mixed with the Miskitos supposedly was a black who jumped from a boat carrying blacks to be slaves in Honduras or Belize. Blacks who worked for the Spanish in Olancho also took refuge in the Mosquitia. There were also English speaking Blacks brought by the British to cut mahogany who formed families with Miskito women.

It is possible that the influence of English speaking Blacks who caused the Miskitos to reorganize. Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it appears the Miskitos did not have a king. But after kings with English names like Samuel and Old Man, there becomes established in the Misquitia a reigning family that inherited the position of king from father to son in the same family for 240 years. (Griffin, 1992)

In Africa there had existed kings. One of the characteristics of African Kings is that they had many wives. One Miskito king had more than 20 wives. Perhaps Africans taught the Miskitos how to form a kingdom.

Another trait of the Miskitos, that they made war on neighboring tribes and sold them as slaves may also have been learned partly from the Africans among them. Many

Miskito foods are influenced by contacts with other Afro-Honduran groups such as Garifunas and Black English speakers.

Besides cutting mahogany, the English settlers on the North Coast had slaves, especially a Mr. William Pitt at Black River, near the modern town of Palacios. These slaves and mulattos worked in agriculture such as planting sugar cane. In the Treaty of Peace of 1783 it was provided that England would abandon the Islands and in 1786 they agreed to a further article to evacuate the country of the Mosquitos and the Island adjacent without exception. (Isaguirre et al., 2003)

However, some did not go and others took refuge in the Mosquitia. The Spanish who used English speaker as canoe paddlers complained that there were almost as many English speakers after the treaty as before.

The English speakers were also very active traders. Since they did not pay taxes to the government of Honduras, the government considered the trade to be contraband or smuggling. There are reports of English traders in Olancho, in the Mosquitia, traveling down river to the Danli, El Paraiso area, and even to the fair at San Miguel. Some of these English traders were white, but some were probably people of color.

In the years between Honduran Independence in 1821 and the abolishment of slavery in Belize, there was an influx of Belizean slaves who came to Honduras to be free. Early Honduran laws abolished slavery and prohibited discrimination under Honduran law by race. Any Belizeans who could get to Honduras could be free. There was still mahogany in the Uluva valley, so there was work available if they escaped. As the Blacks who built the Omoa fort were Koromantee from Ghana, they may have been from the same ethnic groups as many Belizean slaves. Stories of Tecumseh, a folk hero of Ashanti tales, still circulate in Puerto Cortes. These early Belizean immigrants may have merged with Afro-colonial Spanish speaking blacks into the Ladino population, or they may have maintained their English speaking heritage and joined immigrants of later migrations to form the English speaking Black population of Puerto Cortes.

In 1830 the English of Belize returned to the Islands, but after complaints of the Central American governments, the Islands were restored to Honduras. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a few Scotsmen, people from Grand Cayman and some Jamaicans began to settle the Islands. Some claimed the Islands for Great Britain and asked for Magistrates from Belize to govern the Islands. The exact ownership of the Islands was not settled until the Wyke-Cruz Treaty, published in the Honduran Gazette December 10, 1859. (Isaguirre et al., 2003) Even for a few years after that there was still confusion and Bay Islanders themselves wrote in favor of remaining part of Belize. (Naylor, 1989)

### **The Work of English Speakers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, English speakers worked extensively in cutting mahogany. The work was very hard. In order to avoid the heat of the sun, they cut wood at night by torchlight. There were abundant mosquitoes. These trees were found in areas that were

pure jungle. They were cut down with large broad axes. Later they had to cut off the branches. The workers cleared a path to haul the huge trunks down to the river. Between Twelve and eighteen oxen hauled the trunks to the river banks, so these teams of men working were known as bull gangs. After collecting a number of trunks by the river, the lumberjacks accompanied the trunks to the mouth of the river in small canoes, where the trunks were loaded on to ships.

In the Bay Islands, English speakers were again the predominant ethnic group in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Roatan reportedly seven-eighths Black (Isaguirre, 2003). The men worked in fishing in agriculture. The export of bananas from the Bay Islands to the US began after the Civil War. The major export of the Bay Islands for much of its history was coconuts. Ships arrived to buy the copra, or the dried meat of the coconut trees, which was used to make coconut oil. At this time there were no African palms in Honduras and coconuts were an important source of oil. The largest company in the US which sells coconut, Baker's coconut, also had an interest in coconut from Honduras' Bay Islands.

The Bay Islanders like the Garifunas used the leaf of the cohune palm to make their thatch roofs. The Bay islanders called this plant "thatch log". This palm also produces a very hard nut. A lot of this nut was sold during the First World War, as its charcoal was considered the best filter for gas masks. Later the company, La Blanquita, a subsidiary of Hermanos Vaccaros later known as Standard Fruit, used to buy the nuts of the cohune palm to make oil Bay Islanders would gather the nuts and crack them in order to sell them to the company. Coconuts sold for a low price and cohune nut cracking was also very lowly paid.

The Bay Islanders of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were very poor. They practiced subsistence agriculture and fishing. They made their own salt and vinegar. They did not buy soap, but rather they made it from animal fat, lye and borax that turned the soap blue. The coconut oil that they made, they would put it in a jar, add a wick and that was the light for their house. The only things they needed to buy were flour and cloth. They would go in small boats, called a dory, to Belize to buy 192 lb. sacks of flour to make bread and cakes. There were Bay Islanders on the Islands before the town of La Ceiba existed. In Belize they could get things like Royal Readers which were used to teach their children to read. Many Bay Islanders eventually had family members in Belize.

The banana export trade on the North Coast began as US ships bought bananas from independent growers, many of whom were Garifuna in the areas of Balfate/Nueva Armenia and Micos Lagoon around Tela. In 1899 the United Fruit Company is formed and by 1920 they had bought up a controlling interest in all the steamship companies that came to the North Coast, except those going to La Ceiba. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century United Fruit got permission to build railroads in exchange for land in the areas of Puerto Cortes, Tela, Trujillo and Iruya, while Vaccaro Brothers (later Standard Fruit and since 1959 part of Dole) got permission to build a railroad from La Ceiba also in exchange for land.

The first settlers of La Ceiba, besides the Garifunas, were the English speaking stevedores of Barrio Ingles. Most were of Jamaican descendant. As the banana companies expanded, they attracted a lot of immigration from English speaking Blacks from Trinidad, Jamaica, Belize and Grand Cayman which at the time were all poor countries. The concessions of these companies sometimes prohibited the importation of Chinese, Black and Malay workers, but for just one strike of the Truxillo Railroad Company, United Fruit imported an estimated 6,000 Black workers. The Black English speakers of the Coast sometimes married Bay Islanders and went to live on the Islands. The Bay Islanders would go and work for a time on the Coast. There was a lot of movement that united the two groups. Families became international with part of the family in Honduras and part in Belize, Jamaica, and eventually in the US.

In the early 1930's, President Carias had a law passed that limited to 5% the number of workers of foreign origin that a company could have in Honduras in response to the depression. The government sent at least three ships to take English speaking blacks from banana centers like Trujillo and deported them reported Garifuna sailor Sebastian Marin. He said afterwards Barrio Rio Negro where these English speakers had lived remained sad.

The banana companies used to have separate clubs for English speakers, Garifuna speakers, Spanish speakers, and white foreigners who worked for the company. There were English speaking churches, some of which remain in Puerto Cortes, Tela and La Ceiba. There were bilingual schools where most of the teaching was in English. English speakers from certain countries like Jamaica were favored for certain technical jobs, because there were good technical schools there. They were able to get jobs as mechanics, truck drivers, working on the railroad, etc. They also spoke English the language of the managers.

English speakers used to live in different neighborhoods from other ethnic groups. Barrio Ingles near the dock in La Ceiba still bears the names of its founders. In Trujillo many English speakers lived in Barrio Rio Negro, although many lived in Puerta Castilla itself which was the headquarters of the Truxillo Railroad Company. In Tela most English speakers lived in New Tela in Barrio La Curva which was near the English language Episcopal School and Church. Most of these areas are near where the white foreign managers lived. In contrast, the Garifunas tended to live outside of Tela, La Ceiba and Puerto Cortes, and in a different neighborhood (Barrio Cristales) in Trujillo in their permanent homes, although many Garifunas worked for a while out in the banana camp towns, such as Coyoles Central of the Standard Fruit Company.

In the 1930's, the Truxillo Railroad began to close operations. Here the main labor force had been Garifunas, Black English speakers and Miskito Indians. According to Garifuna Sebastian Marin, who worked for more than 30 years for United Fruit, the company offered its workers a chance to change jobs and become a sailor in their shipping company. Especially after the Second World War, many Bay Islanders became sailors. Those who had a good record with the company had the right to take their family to the US.

During the Second World War, most banana exports from Honduras were halted because the ships were commandeered by the US government to act as transport ships for the war—the famous Great White Fleet of the United Fruit company. Thus Honduran merchant marines saw action in the Second World War. The lack of jobs probably forced some English speakers to leave Honduras. After the banana strike of 1954, the banana companies became mechanized and two thirds of the jobs disappeared. This resulted in massive migrations of English speakers from the North Coast. Some returned to their country of origin like many Belizeans. Others migrated to the US. People report that whole neighborhoods migrated. Of the large English speaking populations of the United Fruit company towns of La Lima and Tela, there remain a handful of old people and the graves of the dead.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, some English speakers still worked in wood cutting. This is the origin of the English speaking community of Plaplaya in the Mosquitia. These Belizean woodcutters were brought by a sawmill owner to cut wood for export. When the sawmill shut down, the Belizeans were too poor to go home. Now in Plaplaya you can hear four languages—English, Garifuna, Miskito and Spanish.

The labor situation for English speakers has changed. There are still many sailors. The Honduran government has received tens of millions of dollars to help the frozen seafood industry in the Islands from the World Bank. However, the future of this industry is not bright because of overexploitation of lobster, conch and fish. It is possible as an export industry it will soon be forced to shut down. For many years, English speakers were the English teachers in Honduran high schools and bilingual schools, but few English speakers go to Honduran Spanish speaking universities. As more Spanish speakers graduate from English teacher training programs, this limits the number of jobs available to untrained English speaking teachers.

English speakers no longer have a strong presence in the logging industry where Ladinos with chain saws and massive logging trucks predominate. There is little presence of the English speakers or Garifunas in the banana industry which is almost entirely run by Ladinos. The coconut industry in Honduras is dead due to Lethal yellowing coconut tree disease. African palms, grown exclusively by Ladinos, have taken over the oil palm industry. Few Bay Islanders do any farming.

Right now tourism is a growing industry in the Bay Islands, but much of the work goes to Ladinos. The Bay Islanders speak English, but often can not read or write it. They learn to read and write Spanish in school, but few speak it well. There are Bay Islanders who learn Standard English, but Bay Islands English can be hard for tourists to understand. Ladinos take the lower level jobs like cleaning, waiter and barman. There are conflicts as Ladinos work for less than Bay Islanders. The arrival of Ladinos also causes land conflicts as these new people have to have somewhere to live, water services, etc. There is a program at Roatan High School to teach Bay Islanders to work in tourism and Bay Islanders are sending their children there. The recently opened Bay Islands University may open other career opportunities for Bay Islanders.

Of the minority ethnic groups that are considered autochthonous, the only one where some of the people have gone on to become wealthy are Bay Islanders. The shipping companies such as Hyde Shipping are one way some Bay islanders became wealthy. Participation in the frozen seafood trade has made others wealthy. There are persistent stories that the seafood boats and shipping companies are involved with the movement of drugs in Honduras, that boat captains sell drugs to the Miskito divers, etc. An official government report stated that they suspected that drugs were entering the US in containers of frozen seafood from Honduras, which are not opened on the US side so as to not ruin the seafood. Laundering drug money is also reportedly behind part of the real estate boom. From time to time, Honduran officials capture Bay Islanders in relations to drugs, but not any big people involved with transporting drugs or laundering money. When there are murders, one of the first suspicions is that it is a drug deal gone bad.

Participation in the tourist industry varies. On Utila before Hurricane Mitch, there were approximately 1,000 tourists a week on an island with a native population of only 1,500. Most Island families had developed some business in relation to tourism

On Roatan, most of the big resorts or hotels are not owned by Bay Islanders. There have been a few old cheap wooden hotels owned by local people, but these were not where most of the tourists went. Bay Islanders are struggling to open up jobs for Bay Islanders. For example most of the dive instructors are foreigners. The Bay Islanders have asked for free training of Bay Islander dive masters. At least one Bay islander has gotten certified as a dive master this way and runs his own dive shop. There is no restaurant of traditional Bay Island food. Most of the nice restaurants on Roatan are owned by foreigners. Local Bay islanders said no credit is available to help them open small businesses.

In Honduras, employment with the government is an important of employment. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most Bay Island government jobs were held by English speakers. Both Blacks and white Bay Islanders could rise to the level of congressman, mayor, or governor. In Honduras immediately after Independence a law was passed that it was illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, so Bay Islanders have been eligible to vote for a s long as they have been a part of Honduras.

Lower level government jobs in Honduras are given out to people who help political campaigns. Spanish speaking Hondurans are much more likely to be active in political parties and have obtained the majority of lower level government jobs in the Bay islands such as Immigration, Police, etc. Higher level posts like mayor, or deputy go to people who also contribute financially to political campaigns. Thus Bay Island business owners, both native Bay Islanders and Ladinos, have been able to win these positions. The governor position is appointed. One recent governor, Dorn Ebanks, was a Black Bay Islander native of Coxen Hole, a Baptist minister, a founder of the Christian Revival Network in Coxen Hole, and a founding director of NABIPLA, the ethnic organization of the Bay Islands.

With two or three exceptions, the teachers are Spanish speakers, mostly from the Mainland. The government has not provided a professionalization program for Bay Islanders to become teachers as they have the Pech, Tawahka, Garifuna and Miskitos. Instead they pay a bonus to mainland teachers who are willing to teach in the Bay Islands as a hardship post, similar to the Mosquitia. There are many Blacks teaching in the Bay Islands, but these are mostly Garifunas from the Mainland or from Punta Gorda on Roatan.

## **Population**

The estimates of the combined population of Bay Islanders and North Coast English speakers are between 13,000 and 80,000 according to UNDP. (UNDP, 2004)

## **Ethnic Organization**

The organization which represents the interests of the Bay Islanders and North Coast English speakers is called NABIPLA—Native Bay Islanders Professional and Laborers Association. Its office is in Coxen Hole, Roatan, Bay Islands. It is associated with CONPAH—The National Confederation of Autochthonous Peoples of Honduras.

In Honduras there are two large Garifuna organizations. One is the grassroots organization OFRANEH—The Fraternal Organization of Blacks of Honduras. In the past it has tried to be the spokesman for all Blacks of Honduras, including English speakers. The English speakers have rejected this. ODECO, the Organization of Community Development, has tried to be the spokesperson and organizer not only of Honduran Blacks, but of all the Blacks of Central America. The leader of ODECO, Celio Alvarez Casildo, has said he would like to be the Martin Luther King for Central American Blacks and is able to get some international funding for conferences, seminars, etc. The Bay Islanders occasionally may be invited to an ODECO event, but Bay Islanders do not accept that ODECO represents them. ODECO is an NGO, or as they are called in Honduras, a Private Development Organization, not an organization with grassroots membership.

## **Language**

The language of Honduran English speakers is English. But it is not Standard English like one hears on the radio or TV. It is a non-standard English known as Bay Islands Creole. There are variations between one Island and another and between Bay Islands Creole and that spoken on the North Coast, known as North Coast Creole. It is sufficiently different from standard English that an American hearing Bay Islanders speak together may or may not understand the conversation.

There are books on Creole English, and some identify 30,000 speakers of North Coast Creole in the Mosquitia. Many Miskitos are partially descended from English speakers, but most do not speak Creole English. There are many English words in

Miskito, but not enough for a Miskito to understand a conversation with English speakers and a Creole speaker will not understand a conversation in Miskito.

### **The Language of the Bay Islands and the Bilingual-Intercultural Education Project**

Until 1992, it was illegal to use English in public schools of Honduras, because education was legal only in the official language of the country. Bay Islanders and North Coast English speakers maintained their capacity to read and write in English either through private classes, through attending private bilingual schools, or by sending their children to study in Belize.

The former official educational policy towards all ethnic minorities such as Garifunas, Miskitos and Bay Islanders was called “espanolization”—to make them linguistically and culturally Spanish. For example, the Honduran government did not want to teach the names of Bay Islands town in English Like Calabash Bight, Sandy Bay or Flowers Bay. The teachers had to make up names in Spanish for these places and teach them such as Bahia de Flores (Flowers Bay) or Bahia Arenosa (Sandy Bay), said retired teacher Arnold Auld. It was prohibited to speak any English in the school even though many young children arrived speaking nothing else.

If the parents wanted their children to learn to read and write English, they sent them to private lessons, where some older people would teach them using the Royal Reader. This was used on the North Coast as well. Some people sent their children to study in Belize, where the schools were in English.

In 1992 a law was passed which changed the definition of the official language of the country to include all the autochthonous languages of the country such as Pech, Miskito, Tol, etc. This law also included English since that is the language of the Bay islanders. In 1992 there began a pilot project of bilingual education in two public kindergartens near Coxen Hole, Roatan. When the National Program for Education for Afro-Antillean and Autochthonous Ethnic Groups of Honduras (PRONEEAAH) was founded, Bay islanders were included in the official program of Bilingual-Intercultural Education. The law that founded his program represents a huge policy change for Honduras as it recognizes the richness of Honduras’ past as a multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual people.

Even before this program began, Bay Islanders had sought methods to include English teaching for their children. For example, in French Cay the parents paid for a private English teacher at the school. In Diamond Rock and a few other communities, British volunteers helped to teach English classes.

The bilingual intercultural education project is authorized in the Islands. It is a very complicated situation because in some schools, there are English speakers who speak little Spanish and there are Ladinos who speak little or no English. The majority of teachers in the Bay Islands are Spanish speakers from the Mainland, for a number of reasons including there is no Normal School in the Bay islands, the parents do not accept

to send their high school aged children to study alone on the Mainland to Normal Schools there, and the Islanders consider the job of public school teacher to be poorly paid.

English speakers in Honduras understand Standard English which they have heard since their childhood through radio, television, and church. The central government has suggested many times that the bilingual program in the Islands be in Creole English, but the Bay Islanders have said in meeting after meeting that they do not want an educational project in Bay islands English. This type of teaching of Standard English as a second dialect requires special training for the teachers which they had not had. It would also be helpful to train them in Spanish as a Second Language, which has not happened. Intercultural education also requires teaching about Bay Islands culture and the Spanish speaking teachers say they do not know anything about Bay Islands culture so they can not teach it. So the Bay Islander program, like that of other ethnic groups does not function very well in public schools.

There are private bilingual schools and Bay Islanders attend these when it is within their reach economically. There are families who immigrate to La Ceiba for the lack of a bilingual high school in the Bay Islands. Recently Bay Islands University has opened on the Bay Islands. The Bay Islanders also take advantage of programs of education by correspondence courses from the US to obtain advanced training. Before it was possible to study by correspondence and receive a high school diploma through an exam in the US, known as G.E.D. (General Equivalency Diploma). The US no longer permits foreigners who do not reside in the US to take this exam.

Only recently has there been a public junior high/senior high school and that is only on Roatan. It was built with raffles and other projects to raise money locally. This high school offers technical degrees in business (mostly accounting) and tourism with the teaching being only in Spanish.

There are no programs for adult education in the Bay Islands, even though these types of programs like completing grade school by radio schools, high school through distance education, night programs to complete elementary school are common in the Spanish speaking part of Honduras.

## **Religion and Honduran English Speakers**

Honduran English speakers belong to a variety of English churches. Probably one with the greatest impact was the Methodist Church. This church began in English from the Anglican Church, the official church in English. In Honduras this church is known by its American name, the Episcopal Church. Methodist beliefs came to the US with English migration. In the US there was a time of great religious fervor in the 1830's, known as the Great Awakening. This movement through missionaries had a great impact in the Western Caribbean and since then many Caribbean English speakers have been Methodists. Many Methodists were active in the movement to abolish slavery and once they had their freedom encouraged education for Blacks.

There are still English speaking Methodist churches on the Bay Islands, in La Ceiba, and Puerto Cortes. Many English speakers who attend the Episcopal Church in Tela say they are Methodists, but they attend the Episcopal Church there because it is the only one in English.

Other churches of importance are the Baptist Church, Jehovah's Witness, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Church of God. There have been Adventist and Baptist schools since at least the 1860's in the Bay Islands. The Baptists have been active in founding Christian radio and Christian television in the Bay Islands. Currently there is a Christian TV station, CRN, the Christian Revival Network. There is a Catholic church in Coxen Hole whose priest also holds services in West End. The Catholics are almost all Spanish speakers who have immigrated to the Islands.

The Methodist Church organizes certain activities during the year that have become part of Island life. On December 31<sup>st</sup> (New Year's Eve), the churches celebrate Watch Night when the people meet at church and the Sunday School children put on a show such as poetry recitals, etc. The members believe that the end of the world and the Second Judgment could come at midnight and when Jesus comes again, they do not want him to find their soul in a bar. The majority of Bay Island churches are against the use of alcohol.

In August, the churches celebrate Harvest. People bring things they have harvested like charter bananas, coconuts, red grow yams, etc. This is a time to give thanks for a good harvest.

Before when there was a full moon in the Bay Islands communities, people would organize "Moonlight Hops" or dances where people would dance traditional Bay Island dances known as ring plays. It is a characteristic of Bay Islands music that it did not include the violin, perhaps reflecting an old belief that fiddle music was the music of the devil.

Before Christmas, the Sunday School organized Sunday School Treat where the children danced children games like Cheque Senorita. For Christmas the children put on the traditional pageant.

Sunday School was important in the life of the children. If the child did something bad, they were punished twice—once by their parents and again at Sunday School. Any adult in the community felt they had the right to punish a child doing something wrong. If a child said, Mr. So and So punished me to his parents, the parents would ask why and punish the child again. These customs of punishing a neighbor's child are being lost and the people say the result is that a number of Bay Islanders are in jail in La Ceiba for various crimes, especially related to drugs.

Church revivals are still held in the Islands and sometimes Bay Islanders return from the States for them. These church revivals are probably the origin of the name of the community of Camp Bay. However, church attendance is declining in the Bay Islands as

young people are drawn away by the lifestyle of tourists such as drinking, dancing and in discotheques. Churches that are more evangelical, and sometimes those that are more modern with electric guitar Christian music for example, draw attendance away from the old mainstream Methodist church.

Baptisms, weddings burials and the retirement of pastors are also celebrated in the church. Generally the whole community is present. The week was organized around work and the church. On Saturday they cleaned their yards and their houses and made cakes and other foods for Sunday, so that Sunday they would be free to go to church. Many churches still have mid-week meetings. On the North Coast the church formed the heart of the community, especially in areas like Tela where the bilingual school was also associated with the church.

### Previous Religion

Little has remained of their religious practices before they became Christians. Betty Meigham, an English speaker from La Lima, remembers when the Belizeans used music to accompany the dead to the cemetery like Jazz funerals in New Orleans. This reflects an African tradition. It is no longer done among English speakers.

On Christmas Day is Sandy Bay in Roatan, a man dressed in plants used to dance. This dance was called John Canoe. Probably it was originally related to giving thanks and asking for fertility for their crops, but the dance continued as a tradition after it lost that meaning. It is no longer danced. Almost all Islander dances are disappearing as the majority of Protestant denominations they belong to are against dancing.

The influence of African beliefs remains in the oral literature of the Bay Islanders. The African religions put a lot of emphasis on the spirits of the ancestors. The Bay islanders call ghosts, “Duppeys”. Duppey is a Jamaican word that comes from the Akan languages of the country of Ghana in Africa to refer to the spirits of the dead. The term “duppey” among Bay Islanders includes all the different types of spirits of the dead among Garifunas including “gubida” (the spirit of an ancestor, such as a mother or grandparent), ufiyu (the spirit of a recently dead person who has not gone to the land of the ancestors yet), mafia and biyubiyuti (spirits of the dead who do not go the land of the ancestors because something ties them to the earth, such as money). Duppey stories also include the belief in zombies—of the dead who have been raised.

African religions believed a lot in witchcraft. Belize was and is a great center of witchcraft. There were people in the Islands who knew how to raise the dead, use witchcraft to cause illnesses, and cure illnesses caused by witchcraft. These beliefs exist among Bay Islanders, especially in their oral literature.

It is difficult to get people to tell the traditional stories of the Bay Islands, because they say they are lies and one should not tell lies.

When there were witches (brujos) among the English speakers of the North Coast, Garifunas would go to them as well as Garifuna shaman and “brujos”.

One story is about and “ufiyu” or a spirit of a recently dead person. It used to be that there people who knew how to stop these ghosts and ask them why they did not rest in peace. There was a spirit of a woman who would appear to people in Trujillo. A man who knew how to make “ufiyu” speak asked her why she did not rest. She said she had 6 centavos hidden in her carrying basket or “gadauri”, and she needed to tell her family about it. After the man told her family what she wanted them to know, she stopped appearing to people said Don Chanco of Trujillo.

Don Sebastian, a Garifuna, reported his sister had taken off her wedding ring to take a shower in the bathrooms provided by the United Fruit Co. in Tela. When she finished showering, the ring was gone. They questioned the neighbors who said they knew nothing about it. They went to a man who knew how to find lost things. He said one of her three neighbors had the ring and that he was at that moment trying to sell it. But he would not be able to sell it and if he did he would suffer from an illness that no “brujo” would be able to get rid of. After the neighbor realized the ring was cursed, he brought it back, throwing it down saying, “Here is the accursed ring,” even though previously when they asked him about it, he said he knew nothing.

A descendant of English speaking Belizeans in Trujillo said her grandfather had been a famous “brujo” around Trujillo. Another Garifuna woman Dona Luisa went to an English speaking “curandero” or healer because she suffered from pain in her head and dizziness. He asked if she had lost a headscarf. She said, “Yes”. He said her illness was caused by “maleficio” which is to say it was caused by witchcraft. He offered to cure her for a high price, several hundred dollars. She paid the price and was treated with plants, but was not cured.

One of the things “brujas” or female witches do is prevent men from being unfaithful, attracting a man to a woman, and divining if a man is being unfaithful. There is still a woman who does this in the Bay Islands. This type of work is called “hechiceria” in Spanish, putting these spells in the same category as spells to cause illness (maleficio). For divining she used the smoke and ashes of cheap Honduran cigars, which are mostly used for magic, religious and medicinal purposes in Honduras, rather than regular smoking. The belief in witchcraft is alive in Honduras among most ethnic groups, and Garifunas consider that English speakers used to use it a lot.

Betty Meigham tells a funny story about a neighbor in La Lima and the belief that English speaking people were great “hechiceros”, people who used spells from witchcraft. A neighbor had a lot of problem with some people bothering her. So she took some dog poop and put it in her yard and danced around it. People asked what she was doing. She said she was putting a curse on the people who were bothering her. After that she did not have problems with these neighbors.

## **Music and Dance**

The instruments which accompany the traditional dances of the Bay Islands included a comb, a drum, maracas, guitar, “claves” (two round sticks that are beaten together, an instrument of African origin), and a coconut or “yuca” grater. They made these instruments themselves. Currently there is no one who knows how to make a Bay Islands drum or guitar. Few people know how to play a comb any more. A comb covered with paper and blown upon to make sounds similar to a harmonica was also an instrument among the Garifunas and Blacks in the US.

The Islanders because they are Protestants and not Catholics do not celebrate Patron Saints’ Fairs that are so important in the Spanish speaking part of Honduras. Their popular dances where they survived were danced in family gatherings such as weddings or in events organized by their churches.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century only one religious dance was reported among English speakers on the North Coast, and that was accompanying the body of a dead person to the grave with a procession and music. This custom was also common among Garifunas.

For their popular dances, sometimes they organized a Plantation Dance. The men and women dressed in work clothes, the men with his machete and the woman with her coconut grater. The people decorated the room with plants and leaves from their plantations. Typical foods were served. One of the last such dances was held for the retirement of Bay islands teacher Arnold Auld (Arnold Auld, personal communication).

### **Ring Plays**

Most traditional dances of the Bay Islanders were called Ring Plays. These dances included Penina Weep, One August Night, and Bobby Sheffield. These songs were sung in Bay Islands English. The movements of the dances were based on English country dances such as reels. These dances were done at weddings and Moonlight Hops.

Children also played traditional games with songs in English such as Obeah Man, I like a boy (Me gusta un Chavo) and Cheque Seniorita. The children’s game Obeah man is very interesting. It was played on the North Coast explained an English speaking teacher who grew up in La Ceiba.

Obeah man was the person who not only knew how to cure illnesses, but also had knowledge of magic such as finding out who caused witchcraft or who had stolen things. The word is used in many places in the Caribbean and the origin of the word Obeah comes from Ghana in Africa where many slaves in the Caribbean came from.

In this game, the person who is the Obeah man is outside the circle. Inside the circle of children holding hands is a child on the ground acting sick. The children sing, “Obeah man, can you tell what will make this lady well. For she is sick and sure to die and that will make her Mama cry.” The Obeah man then answers that they should slap her on the

back and change her name to Lucy Ana. Then different children play the sick child and the Obeah man.

### **May Pole and Plat Pole**

Bay Islanders danced May Pole and Plat Pole. May pole was danced in May. They used every day clothes. There was a tree in the middle with many branches. In the branches there were fruits and other things were hung. Below the tree people joined together and danced to songs sung in English. Different people would organize these dances in the patio of their houses. After they had danced for a while, the host let the people try to rob the things hanging from the tree.

In spite of the name May Pole, this is not the dance May Pole danced in England. That dance is called Plat Pole.

For this dance there was a pole in the center with many ribbons of different colors. The dancers would grab hold of each one. Following the steps of the dance, they would end up with a pole braided in different color ribbons. It used to be common to dance this dance for the 15<sup>th</sup> of September (Independence Day in Honduras), a time when they would also organize other activities such as the election of a queen, horse races, and the game of grease pole (palo encebado).

Now the celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> of September is not the same and most of these activities are not done any longer (Flores, 2004). Most of the information on Dances was provided by Arnold Auld and Randy Webster of Roatan.

### **Dances Done at Christmastime**

For Christmas, the people danced at least two versions of John Canoe. In Sandy Bay on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, a person danced covered with plants. The Garifunas dance a dance similar to this called Warine. Currently this dance is not done. It was informed by a Spanish speaking teacher who grew up in Sandy Bay.

Another form of John Canoe was a man dressed in ugly rags who went dancing from house to house accompanied by musicians. For example one group of dancers went from Flowers Bay to Coxen Hole in Roatan. The dancer frightened the children and if you gave him a little money he moved on to another house. It is similar to Mascaro of the Garifunas and previously was danced all over the Bay Islands, but now only on Bonacco, Guanaja Island. The dance was informed by Arnold Auld (Flores, 2003).

John Canoe dances were previously danced in all the Caribbean Islands. The dance's name came from John Canby, a man who sold slaves in Ghana, a country in West Africa.

Also for Christmas the Bay Islanders played "Barbarian Indian". Someone dress up like an Indian and held up people for money. Children screamed when they saw him. The

game is played by the Garifunas. On the North Coast the Garifunas and English speakers celebrated Christmas together. For example, people danced through Barrio La Curva in Tela and Barrio Rio Negro in Trujillo.

## **Clothes**

Currently the clothes of the Bay Islanders are similar to other Hondurans, except in general they do not wear cowboy hats, so prevalent among Honduran campesinos. Their clothes are different from Garifunas in that women generally do not wear headscarves. Among the Garifunas, the women generally wear their hair in braids. Among Bay islanders this is only common in children who wear their braids decorated by brightly colored barrettes. Adult female English speakers commonly have their hair straightened. Previously for plantation dances men wore hats of woven palm leaves or henequen (from the agave or maguey plants) and women wore head scarves so in some way the Bay islanders felt this was part of their traditional dress.

From pieces of cloth that were left over from their sewing, the women made patchwork skirts. Also they used the cloth from flour sacks to make flour sack dresses. Now mostly they use dresses or blouses and skirts. The clothes of the Bay Islanders do not use the brightly colored fabrics such as flowers and checked gingham that is characteristic of Garifuna traditional clothes.

The Bay Islanders give a great deal of attention to being neat and clean. Clothes were kept white with blue soap, made from animal fat, lye, and borax. Clothes were previously boiled to get them really clean. Then the women made starch from the manioc or “yucca” plant. Their clothes were starched and irons made of hot irons placed over a fire were heated. Doing the laundry occupied at least three days during a week, especially when in the early twentieth century when it was common to wear a white suit and pants for formal occasions and for teaching school, reported Mr. Arnold Auld.

## **Crafts and Artists**

In the past there were several Bay Islands crafts. For example, they made several musical instruments, such as a drum, maracas, and “claves”, an instrument of African origin made of two sticks struck together. The artisans who knew how to make these instruments have already died out. The Bay Islands drum was similar to the Garifuna drum.

Their most important craft that they still make is a grater. There is a “yuca” grater and a coconut grater. The part that grates is made of metal. There are two sticks of wood, one on either side. Besides serving as a grater in the kitchen, it was also a musical instrument. It was played with something metal, like a nail. The Garifunas and the Miskitos also use a metal grater as a musical instrument. The Bay islanders do not make a strainer, as they use the “sea feather” soft coral (in Standard English this is usually called a sea fan) as the strainer, for example for making coconut oil.

There are people who know how to make crafts from cattle horn. When Bay Islanders kept horses, they used the skin to make horse hide belts. There one Bay Islands woman who sells embroidery, such as embroidered wedding dresses. Some Bay Islands women know how to crochet. There is nowhere Bay islands crafts are sold except the embroidery, and they are in danger of disappearing.

There is an artist who is from a North Coast English speaking family—Virginia Castillo of La Ceiba. Her mother was of Jamaican origin and her father was a mestizo of the North Coast. She paints with bright colors life as it was before. She also used to appliqué pieces of cloth into pictures of Bay Islands life. Her work is sold in the form of notecards, paintings and T-shirts. She did an interesting series of drawings of the old wooden houses of La Ceiba. Her grandfather from Jamaica was a carpenter who built some of the old houses you can still see in Barrio Ingles and Mazapan. These old houses are being town down as Barrio Ingles is converted into part of downtown La Ceiba, Honduras' third largest city.

Some artists did not get recognized until they immigrated. Sabas Whittaker, one of 8 children of a Bay Islands woman from Grand Cayman and a Garifuna man from the Bay Islands, was born in Puerto Cortes. At age 15 he became a sailor, returning to Puerto Cortes from time to time to visit his mother. He eventually got his GED and studied at the university in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Currently he lives in Connecticut. The author of three books, a composer of Latin Jazz with 3 CD's, and an artist he exhibits in the States.

### **The Traditional Architecture of the Islanders and North Coast English Speakers**

Since many English speakers were brought to Honduras to work in timber cutting, it should not surprise us that many Bay Islanders and North Coast English speakers knew how to work with wood. They made small boats called “dory”. There are still cabinet maker shops in the Bay islands where men prepare doors and cabinets.

The traditional houses of the Bay Islands were made on pylons, often over the water. In the ports of the North Coast, the houses were sometimes two stories with a large porch on the second floor. In the Islands, various hurricanes, including Hurricane Mitch, have destroyed many of the houses that were over the water and now most people build their houses on land. There is a conflict between the way Bay islanders build their houses and the way the Honduran government titles land that is explained in the last chapter.

Bay Islanders built latrines over the sea, thinking the tide would take away any of the waste. The environmental organization had latrines over the sea taken down. Then people had to go in the bush. But fancy hotels in Coxen Hole could have the waste from their bathrooms go into the sea if they used pipes. If you look carefully at docks, they sometimes have white plastic pipes going out to the Sea.

The Bay Islanders call the cohune palm thatch log. There are people who know how to make houses entirely out of this material. Currently zinc roofs have replaced palm leaf roofs all over the Islands.

The majority of the old wooden houses of the North Coast English speakers have been replaced by modern structures.

### **Bay Islands and North Coast Stories**

The traditional stories of the Bay Islanders are called “Nancy stories”. This does not refer to a woman named Nancy, but to a spider called in other places Anasi. This spider and his son Tecumseh are the heroes of legends of the Ashanti people in the country of Ghana. The Garifunas and Blacks in almost all the Caribbean tell the stories of Anasi.

In spite of the fact that the stories of the Islanders are called “Nancy stories”, stories about this spider are not currently common on the Islands. On the North Coast a few stories of Tecumseh are heard. Below is an example of an Anasi story told in Honduras, but by Garifunas. Garifunas, Miskito Indians, and Ladinos tell similar stories of the rabbit and the tiger or Uncle Rabbit and Uncle Coyote. The situation where the smaller animal rides the larger animal as a horse is told all over the Caribbean. This story is included because the fact that the stories are called “Nancy Stories” probably indicates that in the past these stories were told by English speakers, too, and this one has one of the most common motifs.

#### **Anasi and the Tiger**

Once Anasi was speaking to a group of female spiders. They asked him, “How did it come about that you and the Tiger are compadres?” (Compadres is a Spanish term showing the relationship between a father and the man who is the godfather of his children.)

Anasi said, “Why the tiger and I have such a good relationship, I can ride the Tiger like a horse.” The Spiders did not believe him. He said, “Come tomorrow.”

He went home and got in bed. After a little while, the tiger knocked on his door. Mrs. Spider answered the door.

“How is my compadre today,” asked the Tiger.

“He is sick,” said Mrs. Spider. “I don’t know what it is the matter with him. Maybe you should come back tomorrow.”

The spider came back the next day. He knocked on the door and Mrs. Spider answered. “How is my compadre?” asked the Tiger.

“Look. He is really sick. He can’t get up to go to the bathroom on the beach. I don’t know what I am going do,” said Mrs. Tiger.

“Comadre, what a lack of confidence. I can help you. Let me see my compadre,” said the tiger.

“Compadre, I came to help you go outside,” said the Tiger to the Spider.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the Spider. “I could fall. I need something like a saddle.”

The tiger was not very happy with this, but to help his compadre, he let them put a saddle on him. “OK, Now we can go,”

“Oh, compadre, I am really sick. I need something like reins, so I do not fall.” So they put reins on the Tiger. Then the Spider got a the Tiger.

They go outside and the Spider greets the female spiders. “Look what I told you. I can ride the tiger like ahorse.”

Collected by students of the National Teaching University, La Ceiba campus in the community of Limon.

The phrase “Nancy Story can refer to an animal story or a ghost story. Below is an example of a Bay Island story of an animal which is called a “Nancy story”.

### **The Dogs**

Have you noticed that generally dogs smell the back part of another dog when it sees one? The reason is like this.

Once there was a party for dogs. All the dogs went. When they went into the party, they left their back part and tail in a room, so they could dance just on their two front legs.

The police arrived at the party. The dogs quickly took any set of back legs and left. Now they sniff the back part of another dog to see if it belongs to them.

Told by Marthell Watler, Watering Place, Roatan

Another type of Nancy story that is common in the Bay Islands are “Duppey” stories. This word is used a lot in Jamaica. It comes from the Akan languages in Ghana in Africa. These spirits were probably related to traditional beliefs of Bay islanders about death, and that is why they are similar to the beliefs of other Afro-Honduran groups such as Garifunas, Miskitos and Ladinos.

## Duppey Stories from Roatan

On the North side of the cemetery in Coxen Hole, two duppeys or ghosts appear dressed in white military uniforms. They appear in July. People thought they were sailors who were left there to protect a buried treasure left there by pirates. Many people have seen them.

Bay islanders believe that the pirates who used to visit the Bay Islands frequently left sailors behind to protect their treasure. The captain would order that they cut the head off of one of the sailors and bury the head with the treasure. Sometimes the pirates did not return. The only way to find the treasure again would be if the ghost appeared in dreams and led someone to the exact location, explained teacher Arnold Auld of Constellation Bight. The Garifunas and Miskitos also believe in spirits of the dead who are tied to this earth by money. Garifunas, English speakers and Miskitos had ways to make these spirits talk so that later the spirit could be freed to go to the land of the ancestors.

The memory of pirates is all around in the Bay Islands. Coxen Hole is named for English pirate John Coxen. Watering Place next to it is named because here was a sweet water source that the pirates used. French Harbor is named for a French Pirate Jean Lafitte.

Near the school “Arnold Auld” there are ghosts that appear there. People believe there is treasure buried there.

Before there were bad people. They were witches (brujos). There were people who learned to raise the dead (make zombies), but they did not know how to make them rest again. This is what happened to a man named Golden Calf. Now he appears to people and frightens them.

This belief that witches can raise the dead to life is alive among the Blacks of Haiti as well.

Sometimes duppeys do not do anything to you. In cConstellation Bight there was a ghost that followed people. Once he saw the person was not going to bother his treasure, he let people go in peace.

Other times they attacked people. A duppey grabbed a man from the side of Corozal road and left him in a guayaba tree, where he spent two nights before his family found him to take him home.

There are duppies in the bush and out in the sea. In this way they are like “mafia” among the Miskitos and Garifunas.

The road to Corozal was famous for the duppies found there. For example a man saw a Spanish lady there. He talked to her. But when he tried to kiss her, he passed right through.

A man saw a baby abandoned on the side of the road. He picked it up in his arms. But after walking a while with the baby, the baby said to him, "You had better put me back where you found me. Have you ever seen a baby with teeth like these," it asked.

Another man heard a baby crying beside the road. He thought what a bad Mama to have left her baby here alone. He picked it up, but as he continued on the baby got heavier and heavier. Finally, the baby said, "You can pick me up, but you can't put me down." The man was suddenly frightened.

These babies were not real babies. They were ghosts. Not only do human ghosts appear. There are also animal ghosts. From time to time a group of pigs would appear on the road to Flowers Bay. The people never managed to catch one or kill one. Finally they realized they were ghost pigs.

### A Threatening Ghost

One night a man had to travel from Flowers Bay to West End, which implies cross the whole island from south to north. The path he had to take was all bush. When he arrived at the top of the hill, he saw two arms that extended towards him, as if they wanted to grab him.

All night long the man remained on top of the hill, trying to make sure those arms did not grab him.

At dawn he realized that it was not a ghost. What he saw were branches of a tree that reflected the moonlight. He went home, got an axe and cut down the tree so that it would never again return to frighten anyone.

Told By: Dorn Ebanks, Coxen Hole Roatan

The English Speakers of the North Coast also told ghost stories.

### O Jesus Thy Name

There was a man who liked to drink. He would go out at night and drink with his friends. Before he went out, his wife said, "If you see any ghosts on the way, you should pray O Jesus thy name..."

The man interrupted her. "I know. I know. Everyone knows you need to say that prayer. I'm going out. Good night," said the man and he left.

When he came back, it seemed someone was following him. When he got to his house, the one who was following him also stopped in front of his house. The man realized it must be a ghost. He began to pray, "O Jesus thy name..." but he couldn't remember the rest of the prayer.

He tried to go into the house, but he could not get in. He began yelling to his wife, “What is the rest of the prayer O jesus thy name...” He yells and yells. His wife finally wakes up and comes down to open the door.

“What were you saying?” asked his wife.

The man looked behind him. “I wanted you to tell me how the prayer O jesus thy name ends, but with all the noise you made getting down here, the ghost left,” complained the man.

Told by Betty Meigham, native of La Lima, Cortes

### The Duende

In addition to ghost stories, the Bay islanders also believe in the “duende”. This Spanish word refers to small spirits, usually male. He used to appear in the corrals of cattle and ponies of the people in West End. Among Ladinos and Miskitos the duende is also associated with cows and deer.

In West End there was also a ghost named Father Red Beard. He had a cave there, explained Denae Wood Etches of the Wood Store in Coxen Hole.

### “Guafiras”

Betty Meigham of La Lima said that older English speaking men used to sit around telling stories. These stories had incredible exaggeration. The stories were called “wafira” or “guafira” in Spanish. The person who told them was a “guafiero”—a person who told guafira. After hearing a story with a lot of exaggeration, the listeners would exclaim, “Que guafirero!” What a man for telling “guafira”.

Once there were some men talking among themselves about who knew how to use a machete the best. A man who was listening said, “Look, what you are saying is easy. I can even kill mosquitoes with my machete.”

The others did not believe him. He told them, “Look, I am going to show you.” He attacked a mosquito with his machete and then showed his hand to his companions.

The others said to him, “We don’t see anything. You did not kill it.”

The man said to them, “That was because I cut the balls off of this mosquito and the balls of a mosquito are so tiny you can’t see them.”

Que guafirero!

Told by Betty Meigham, native of La Lima, Cortes

### The stories of Neff

It is common to tell stories about a hero, but the Islanders tell the story of a boy who was not very intelligent. His name is Neff.

#### Neff & the Sack of Flour

Once the Mama of a boy named Neff heard that there was a ship buying coconuts near Anthony's Key, so his mother sent Neff with many sacks of coconuts to buy flour to make bread. He paddled to Anthony's Key, but the ship had left to go to Sandy Bay.

Neff said to himself, "My Mama sent me to get flour, so flour I will get." He paddled on to Sandy Bay.

When he arrived there, the ship had already left for the Bight. He followed it, but when he got there, it had already left. But he said, "My Mama sent me to get flour, so flour I will get."

It was night time when he reached the boat in Mud Hole, where it was going to spend the night. He sold the coconuts, got the flour, and returned home. He said to his mother, "You sent me to get flour for you, and I brought you flour."

The ship was a boat with sails, a schooner of the Oteri Lines, that sailed out of New Orleans.

Told by James Thomas, Coxen Hole, Roatan  
(Griffin, 1996a)

#### Neff and the Plantains

There was a boy named Neff and he lived near Sandy Bay. One day his mother told him to take some Plantains by horse to the Harvest Festival in Flowers Bay. When he was going there, some thieves saw him and decided to try to rob his plantains.

At this time the majority of Bay Islanders only spoke English. There were few Spanish speakers in the Islands and the English speakers generally did not get near them. While the two thieves were planning how to rob the plantains, one said, "I have an idea. We can talk to him in Spanish and he will be so frightened, he will give us the plantains."

"There's only one problem. We don't know how to speak Spanish>"

"No problem," said the other thief. "I worked for a time in the banana plantations on the mainland of Honduras and I know some words."

So the thief yelled, "Alto. Parese!" (Halt, Stop). Neff was so afraid that he got down off the horse and ran to his house. He forgot he could go faster on the horse than on foot. The thieves got the horse as well as the plantains.

Told by James Thomas, Coxen Hole, Roatan  
(Griffin, 1996b)

## **Food & Agriculture of the Bay Islanders**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before World War II most Islanders lived from agriculture. At that time, there was no tourism to the Islands. After the Roatan airport was built by Islanders through a forced labor program of General Tiburcio Carias in the 1930's, only two airplanes arrived in the first 10 years. The area of the West End which currently has one hotel or restaurant after another was an area of coconut cultivation and what the Bay islanders call "Breadkind" (roots, plantains, bananas. Etc.) Each West End family had their corral where they had a horse or pony, and some cows. The people raised chickens.

The children of West End and Flowers Bay went to West Bay to look for crabs. They would collect half a sack of crabs in a couple of hours and then return home in the "dory". While they were there, they would also collect cocoplums and sea grapes reported James Thomas of Coxen Hole. Now West Bay is the site of homes with a value of millions of lempiras.

### **Agriculture**

There is an American consulate report of Bay Islands agriculture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "The industry of the islanders is devoted almost exclusively to the production of coconuts, bananas, plantains, pineapples, limes, oranges and mangoes.

...Plows are unknown during the dry season...between January and May the ground for planting is prepared by cutting the underbrush and trees and lopping the branches, which covers the ground with a mass of combustible rubbish. This is left to dry in the sun for two or three months and then consumed by fire; after the first rains in May is the time for planting, which is done in the absence of hoes or mattocks by pointed sticks of hard wood. After the only labor required is to keep the weeds down with the machete until the plants have grown sufficiently to maintain their supremacy...Government land is given gratis to anyone native or foreigner who will keep it under cultivation."

(First Annual Report: History of the Bay Islands and Budget of Honduras—Roatan, October 30, 880—Isaguirre et al., 2003)

At the time of this report Bay islanders grew food for themselves and exported fruit—mostly bananas and plantains and coconuts to the New Orleans and New York markets.

Bay Islands agriculture was very similar to Garifuna agriculture. Both ethnic groups grew a number of root crops, most native to the Caribbean Islands. Arnold Auld said, when the older heads wanted to make soup, the first thing they would look for was malanga, a root crop called cocoh in Bay Islands English.

Another root crop typical of the Bay Islands was arrowroot. There were two varieties—a white one and a red one. They were grated to make a porridge (atol). This root crop was scarce before Hurricane Mitch, and afterwards none could be found.

Bay Islanders planted “yucca” or sweet manioc. From this they made a bread like cassava bread called bamy bread. The Garifunas say the difference between bamy bread and cassava bread is that after the person grates the “yucca” and squeezes the juice out of it, bamy bread is made by sifting the cassava flour and making bread right away. To make cassava bread, the cassava flour is left to rest overnight, then sifted and then they cook cassava bread on a hot griddle.

English speakers on the North Coast sometimes bought cassava bread from the Garifunas to eat.

After grating the “yucca”, the juice is squeezed out. If they let this juice sit, a soft white starch settles to the bottom. Bay Islanders used this starch to starch their clothes. It is also medicinal for diarrhea for example. It can be used to make “atol”, a word the Bay Islanders usually translate as porridge.

Another root crop that they grew was called “red grow yams” or “nigger yams”. This red yam is of African origin. It is used in soups. They Bay Islanders also grow sweet potato (camote) which they use to make sweet potato cake.

Bay Islanders grew bananas, plantains, and a banana like crop called “chata” in Spanish. In Bay Islands English its name sounds like charter banana. In addition to long bananas, which are eaten boiled alone or in soups, the Bay Islanders grew little finger bananas which were very popular when ripe. Green boiled bananas with a little salt commonly accompanies many meals. All the plants of the banana, plantain and chata family are of African origin.

Bananas, Chatas, and Plantains are cut on a 45 degree angle and fried in a little oil, to make a dish called “tajadas”. Plantains, both ripe and green, could also be cooked in soups, similar to how Americans include potatoes in soup.

One special food in the Bay Islands was conch and tea (in Spanish atol de chata). Cut the chatas lengthwise and let them dry in the sun for about 3 days. Then put them in a mortar and mash them up. Put them through a corn grinder to grate it up fine. Then use it to make porridge. The Garifunas make a similar dish, but using green bananas called “pluplumaya”.

This food is scarce as is another made of grated bananas called “blue dash”. It was called this, because supposedly grating green bananas made your hands turn blue.

Another way to use bananas was to grate them up, mix with a little coconut milk, and cook in a coconut broth. These were banana dumplings. On the North Coast, they accompanied conch soup.

Bananas could be mashed, mixed with coconut milk, and spices like cinnamon to make banana cake. This is one of several cakes Bay Islanders called pot cakes. Garifunas made them too, calling them breads (pan de ayote, pan de maiz, pan de guineo, pan de yucca. Etc.). The Miskitos make them, calling them cakes (queque de camote, queque de camote, etc.). In the Bay Islands they made pumpkin cake, sweet potato cake, “yuca” cake, banana cake, corn cake, etc.

An example of these cakes is pumpkin cake. Cook the pumpkin or squash in water, put it in a mortar and pound it to mush. Mix in a little wheat flour, cinnamon, vanilla, sugar and coconut milk. Bake it.

The cakes used to be cooked in iron pots with lids over the coals of a fire in a hole in the beach, called a “fire hearth”. Now they are cooked in a modern gas oven.

Bananas and plantains could also be used to make vinegar. If you hang a bunch of bananas over a plastic bowl (pana) and let them ripen until they drip a fermented juice, you can collect it in the bowl. You only do this if you have so many bananas that they go bad. Now people just buy commercially made vinegar. Bananas could also be used to make banana pudding (atol de guineo).

Coconut is fundamental to Bay islands food. They made coconut oil which they made by cooking coconut milk of 50 coconuts in a tin wash tub or sink. The oil is skinned off the top as the coconut milk boils. Coconut oil gives a nice flavor to fried fish or fried shrimp (no breading).

To make the coconut milk, they cut the outer layer of the coconut off. They they cracked the shell, and grated the coconut with a metal coconut grater. They mixed this with the milk or water from the coconut, and sometimes a little boiled water, too. After mixing this up, to get all the oil out, it is passed through a sieve. The Bay Islanders used the soft sea coral usually called sea fan, but the Bay islanders call it sea feather, as the sieve. The meat of the chickens they would then feed to the chickens. Almost no one still makes coconut oil, as the coconut trees have mostly died from a coconut disease called Lethal yellowing. Coconut milk the basis of many Garifuna and Miskito foods as well.

Bay Islanders also grew corn, which they dried and made hominy (arroz de maiz). On the North Coast this was called corn meal porridge. Corn cake (pan de maiz) was also made from corn.

In addition to pot cakes, Bay Islanders make cakes from US cake mixes like Duncan Hines which they call “Lite Cakes”. For Christmas and the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, they make both pot cakes and lite cakes and go and visit family and friends and eat cake.

The fruits most commonly grown in the Bay Islands are breadfruit and mangoes. Previously cocoplums and sea grapes were common, but with the conversion of Bay islands beaches from coconut groves to luxury housing developments, there are few places for the native cocoplums and sea grapes to grow.

Breadfruit is eaten boiled, fried or in soups. From mangoes, they made jams and mango wine, plus they ate them ripe. Both fruits are of Asian origin and the English brought them to Jamaica to feed the slaves. From Jamaica they were brought to Honduras.

The Bay islanders used to make their own salt by boiling salt water. They also grew sugar cane. They processed the raw sugar cane to make raw cane sugar known as “dulce” or “rapadura” in Honduras. They made syrup of sugar cane juice that they used to sweeten things. The older heads said sugar cane mills were dirty. It was better to use the sugar made at home. They also knew how to make the traditional sugar cane candy known as “batido” in Spanish. They also enjoyed the raw sugar cane just chewing it.

The main vegetable that they grew was okra. It was eaten cooked by itself or in soups. This plant is of African origin. Currently it is very scarce in Honduras and is imported from the US in cans.

Of the spices and herbs that they grew, the most important was wild basil (albahaca del monte).

Among traditional beverages, Jamaica sorrel tea (rosa de Jamaica) stands out. For Christmas this is what people drank. Currently it is scarce and is imported from El Salvador. Bay Islanders also made tea from “fever grass” (zacate te), known as lemon grass in Standard English. This is a popular tea throughout Honduras although it is of Asian origin. Coconut water was also popular.

On the Mainland, North Coast English speakers ate many of the same foods. They also made beans and rice cooked in coconut milk. This dish without the coconut milk is common among Spanish speakers who call it casamiento (marriage), or gallo pinto (red rooster) or moros y cristianos (Moors and Christians). Miskitos and Garifunas make it with coconut milk like North Coast English speakers and call it rice and beans using the English words.

Due to social changes in the Islands where most people are sailors, fishermen or people who work in professions or tourism, very few Bay islanders work in agriculture any more. The Bay islanders used to export agricultural products to the US and the Honduran mainland, now everything is imported. It is difficult to prepare Bay Islands foods, because Spanish speaking Ladino farmers on the mainland grow different foods.

Garifunas plant most of the plants Bay islanders used and it would be possible to import agricultural products like chatas from Garifuna communities that still practice agriculture like in Irióna. NABIPLA has been concerned about the situation of Island food and have encouraged a program to grow Bay Islands crops on 18 farms. The sale of Bay islands food would be good to offer to tourists, but there are currently not enough plants to do this.

### Agriculture and Courting

The fact that most Bay islanders used to earn their living by farming affected the way the Bay islanders helped their daughters choose husbands. A man used to ask the parents' permission to court the girl. Before giving their permission, the parents used to give suitors a test. In back of their house, they might have a piece of really hard wood like iron dog wood. The parents would ask the boy to chop the wood for them. One Spanish (Ladino) man wanted to marry a Bay islands girl, but he was a carpenter because he had asthma. The girl's parents gave him this test and he could not do it. He did not receive permission to court the girl, even though he knew carpentry.

People did not go out by themselves when they were courting. The young man came to girl's house. He could stay only until about 9pm and then only 2 or 3 days a week. The couple courted on the porch with all of the family around. Now these customs have changed.

### Medicinal Plants

The Bay Islanders also include a variety of medicinal plants. For example, lemon grass which they call fever grass, can be made into tea. This is what was given to people who had fevers. For example, malaria used to be significant problem on the Islands.

They used "worm weed". This plant called epazote in Spanish kills 5 classes of intestinal worms.

The Bay Islanders made a drink of several herbs together to purify the blood. This is similar to the medicinal drink the Garifunas make "Guiffity".

Sureci was an important medicinal plant in the Bay islands. Called Calaiça in Spanish it has been confirmed by the UNAH to lower blood sugar in people who have problems with diabetes.

Stinging Nettle is a medicinal plant used to treat arthritis and rheumatism. There is a cute story about this plant.

## The Old Man

There was an old man who had arthritis. He went to a healer and asked if he could help him walk. The healer said, "I can not only make you walk, I can make you run."

The healer told the old man to take off all his clothes. When the man was laying down, the healer put on plaster of the plant "chichicaste" or stinging nettle. The man lay there, but his skin stung. As he sweated, the stinging got worse. Finally it stung so much that it almost felt like burning. When he finally could not stand it, he ran out of the house naked to go and bathe to get rid of the stinging and burning.

The healer thought the old man was going to kill him, so he decided to move away to Bonacca, Guanaja. He lived there a while when he saw the old man. He thought, "OH, no, this old man is going to kill me."

But the old man came and greeted him and thanked him for the treatment. Since that day he could walk again.

Told by James Thomas, Coxen Hole, Roatan

There has been no serious study of Bay islands traditional medicine, but the Medical Center is fairly recent on Roatan. Before all healing was done with plants. Traditional Bay islands medicine was called "bush medicine". Some men were recognized as "bush doctors", but it was also common to call on a neighbor woman when there was an illness to recognize and treat illnesses with plants. Even in the 1950's the only medicine available on the Bay islands was a Jamaican bush doctor, a few Garifuna healers and neighborhood women.

The English speakers of the North Coast also used a lot of medicinal plants. Betty Meigham of La Lima, whose family was Belicean, said she did not see a doctor until she was 15 years old, that her mother cured all their illnesses with plants and roots. Belize is a great center of medicinal plants as well as a center of witchcraft.

Traditional Bay islands medicine is being lost in part because the plants are being lost, but even more because the young people are not learning the medicines.

### **Meat and Other Protein Sources in Bay Islands Foods**

Islanders and Blacks on the North Coast ate a lot of fish. There are still hundreds of artisanal fishermen in the Bay Islands between Garifunas and Bay islanders, besides an impressive fleet of boats that work in commercial fishing. Besides fried, the English Speakers also ate fish in fish soup with coconut broth. There have been studies of the fish around the Bay Islands and there has been a significant drop in the fish population, especially fish big enough to fish with a harpoon, a technique known as spear fishing. This type of fishing is illegal in much of the Bay Islands because of the protected area,

but goes on anyway. Another interesting fishing technique is the use of metal wire mesh traps, known as Jamaica traps.

Another cause of the drop in the fish population is the commercial shrimping industry which destroys thousands of tons of fish, known as shrimp bycatch. Bay islanders ate shrimp, especially fried without breading. But most of the shrimp are frozen and sold away from the Bay Islands, including for export.

Commercial fishing also includes lobsters. Bay Islanders use wooden lobster traps and Miskito Indians with scuba tanks to catch lobsters. Commercial lobster fishing has seriously depleted the lobster population. There are seasons when it is prohibited to catch lobster and conch, to give time for these populations to reproduce. The total extinction of the lobsters is feared by environmentalists who note that Honduran boats go out, saying they are going to other countries to fish, and then illegally take lobster from Honduran banks during the closed season known as “veda”. Honduran fishermen argue if they are not out, Jamaican and Columbian lobstermen come and fish Honduras’ coral banks during the closed season. There are size limits on taking lobster which are routinely ignored, and there are catch limits. People fish without permits. Red Lobster has been threatened with a boycott by US environmental and labor groups because of the high incident of death and injuries among the Miskito divers involved in the lobster industry. Red Lobster no longer buys lobster from scuba divers.

Honduras became a player in the international frozen seafood market, partially through help with a World Bank loan.

From the sea, Bay Islanders caught conchs, to make conch soup. Different people make this soup, which is so popular that it has its own hit song “Sopa de Caracol,” differently. All add coconut milk. Some add Irish potatoes. Others make banana dumplings to accompany it. The conchs have to be punded to make them soft and they are boiled separately from the other ingredients of the soup. The water the conchs are boiled in is thrown out, as it has a kind of iodine flavor to it. The cooked conchs are put in the coconut milk soup and served.

The conchs live on the coral banks and before it was possible to see them walk near the Roatan airport. The expansion of the airport killed them near there. Another part live in the parks like West End-Sandy Bay, where it is illegal to fish them, but poaching is common. This animal has also been overfished by commercial fishermen. The Miskito divers used to smash the shells and just take the conchs, but now the conchs are sold for food and the shells to tourists.

Recently frozen conch has been a multimillion dollar export industry in the Bay Islander, but in 2004 the export of conch by Bay Island fishermen is prohibited, because of fishing in areas where the animal is in danger of extinction. The overfishing that benefits a few, affects the ability of many to prepare traditional Bay islander and Garifuna foods.

From the sea Bay Islanders also ate sea turtles. They ate them in soup. Supposedly it was from the reports of Grand Cayman island turtle fishermen that people on that island learned about the Bay islands of Honduras. This led to migration of many Cayman Islanders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Honduras. (Isaguirre et al., 2003) The shells were sold as tortoise shell. Currently the hunting of all 7 classes of sea turtles is prohibited in Honduras. Bay Island shrimp boats faced a ban on their exports to the States if they did not install turtle safe nets on their shrimp boats, which they then installed. In the past shrimp boats killed hundreds of sea turtles each year.

From the land, the Bay islanders ate crabs. A favorite food was the green iguana or black iguana (garrobo in Spanish). There is a special endemic black iguana on Utila called the “Swamper Wisherwilly”. It is delicious. The hunting of the iguanas has severely lowered their population, especially since people believe that the females carrying the eggs are especially tasty. They are easier to catch because they come down to lay their eggs in the sand and hunters can catch them. There is a protected area for them on Utila and on Rotan there is a privately owned green iguana farm. Part of the environmental projects of BICA, the Bay Islands Conservation Association, is to promote awareness to preserve these animals that traditionally have been food.

There are few edible mammals on the Bay islands. The “Guatusa” or paca is known as “Rabbit” in Bay islands English, presumably because they believe they taste similar.

The Bay islanders also ate the meat of domestic animals, since they had their own farms with cattle, pigs, and chickens. Baked chicken was traditional. Because there was not any electricity previously on the Islands, salting the meat became important. On several Caribbean Islands, Salted Pig Tails became a traditional treat, and you can still get them in the Bay Islands.

### **Land Problems and Fishing Rights Conflicts**

The Bay Islanders face many land problems because their lands are sought after by foreigners, investors and Ladinos in search of a better economic opportunity. To encourage tourism, and to a lesser extent to protect some overexploited species, other resources that the Islanders have traditionally had access to are now in protected areas or parks.

The land situation of Bay Islanders is different from other Honduran ethnic groups like Garifunas and Miskito Indians, in that all their lands are held with personal land titles or deeds. There are no collective land titles for Bay islanders, such as there are for example, among the Garifuna, the Pech and the Chortis. Another difference between Honduran English speakers and other Honduran ethnic groups is that the English speakers have no rights under the Human Rights guarantees of International Labor Organization’s Convention 169. This is a major legal document for guaranteeing Indian land rights in Honduras, but these are the Human Rights guaranteed only to Indigenous People and Tribal Peoples, and Bay Islanders are neither one nor the other.

North Coast English speakers are not a unified group. Many own no land or just a house plot. When they have been allowed to settle on Garifuna communally held land, they usually ask for an individual land title, sell the land and move on. The Garifunas get nothing from these sales of their communally held lands.

#### Bay Islands architecture and Honduran land ownership laws

There is a clash between traditional Bay islands architecture and Honduran law. The law says no one can be the owner of the first 14 meters of beach, that these are national lands. Lands under the sea are also national lands. But the Bay islanders build their houses on pylons over the sea. Before Hurricane Mitch, Mangrove Bight on Guanaja had dozens of houses over the sea. It was legally impossible to obtain land titles for these lands. Aid agencies to help rebuild after Mitch insisted on people having legal title to the land.

Yet a case developed where a foreign investor said he bought land that included 12 Bay Islander houses that were part over the beach and part over the water. If it was legally impossible to title these lands to Islanders, it is also legally impossible to sell the land and deed it to foreigners. These families had 12 years or more of peaceful enjoyment of the national lands which gave them some rights to the improvements under Honduran law. But the foreign investor managed to petition Honduran authorities to tear down the houses and they did. This was a clear injustice under Honduran law.

It is also illegal to fence the first 14 meters of beach, because this area is defined as the “camino real” or royal road. But in the Bay Islands there are cases of illegally fencing the beach without the government taking any action.

#### Foreign ownership of land and the Honduran Constitution

The Constitution of Honduras is clear that foreign individuals can not buy land within 40 miles of the Coast, except in urban areas and then only three-quarters of an acre. A corporation can buy land within 40 miles of the coast only if 100% of its stockholders are Honduran, states Art. 107 of the Constitution.

In the Bay Islands, the municipal land registry office permits foreigners to register lands that they have bought that exceed the  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre limit. Not only is the part over  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres illegal, the whole transaction is illegal. This problem has increased since 1992 when a law was passed under the administration of Lic. Rafael Leonardo Callejas that all land apt for tourism is by definition “urban land”. This has opened up Bay Islands land that has no electricity, no running water, and no roads to land speculation and sales to foreigners.

One way foreigners buy land in the Bay Islands which is all within 40 miles of the Coast, is that they form corporations with Hondurans who lend their names as being stockholders and then use the corporation to buy the land. These corporations generally do not conform to Honduran laws regarding corporations. For example, the law requires

that they hold an annual stockholder meeting of all the members and maintain a book of record of the minutes from these meetings. They must present and approve an annual report. Almost all the corporations formed to hold land for foreign individuals near the Coast violate these laws. Article 107 is not being upheld to protect the land rights of Bay Islanders.

There have been unethical real estate agents or companies in the Bay Islands. These companies sell the land without first ensuring that the seller of the land is the actual or sole owner of the land. For example, a Bay Islands woman rented to another Bay Islander some lands she inherited. The person renting the lands sold them and kept the money. A complaint was made to the Attorney General for Ethnic Groups (Fiscalia de las Etnias). He did nothing. He said such cases should be filed with local attorney generals (fiscals). These cases sleep there. Nothing happened to the person who sold the land. Owners of two Bay Islands real estate companies were wanted for fraud in the US, although one Arnold Morris was finally extradited after his Honduran citizenship was cancelled.

When Arnold Morris' company Southwinds bought land for resale, they did not pay completely for it. They paid for it in parts. What was left at the end was often not enough for the person to relocate somewhere else. It was necessary to file a law suit to get all the money, which meant legal fees for the Bay Islanders. This company sold lands without first ensuring exactly where the lands were, said a real estate agent of that company. In this way, sometimes they sold land that another person had land title to.

There have also been cases of two or three people who have together inherited land. One person goes and gets the land title solely in her name and sells the land. This leaves the other inheritors with nothing.

One of the people affected by Southwinds' sales tactics was a reporter for the Wall Street Journal. Southwinds tried to sell his lands. He said he had the intention to take the case to the Honduras' highest court, la Corte Supremo de Justicia. He said he had done investigations all over the world and he had never seen such corruption as existed in the Bay Islands.

The judge who ordered the 12 houses torn down was denounced in the Honduran press as corrupt. A secretary in a Judge's office in Roatan was suspected of purposely losing files and telling people ahead of time when orders of capture were being approved, yet she was not fired. The foreigners living in the Bay Islands said there was a lot of problems applying the law, beginning with the fact that the lawyers did not know the law. The lawyers would reportedly fail to follow through on a case if the other side paid them more to let it drop. Lawyers would lose essential documents, reportedly because the other side paid them to.

## Environmental problems

There are clear environmental laws to protect the environment of the Islanders. They were not respected. The development of West Bay as a tourist destination and luxury real estate development was possible because the contractors had the side of a mountain cut off and dumped on a wetland full of crabs. It is illegal to fill in a wetland for large construction projects without permission from municipal government. The Ministry of Environment fined them the maximum of \$1 million lempiras. The lands were being sold at \$225,000 the quarter acre. The fines did not deter anything.

It is illegal to cut or do dredging of coral reefs, especially in protected areas. A former congressman had dredging done in the marine park of West End-Sandy Bay for a marina. Another owner of a resort sent his workers out with picks and shovels to take out the part of the reef in front of his resort that blocked the easy entry and exit of dive boats from his resort.

Part of the reef is above the water level. It is called ironshore. There are now several luxury buildings on top of the ironshore.

It is illegal to just go out and cut down mangroves. The wetlands and the mangroves protect the coral reef from sedimentation that kills certain animals such as coral and conchs. All over the Islands the mangroves are being cut down. In the long run this will diminish the quantity of water available since the aquifers under the Bay Islands receive water through wetlands and mangrove areas. If the level of sweet water that goes into the aquifer goes down, salt water intrusion from the sea can happen. This can cause the water that people drink to become salty. If this happens the tourists can go home, but what about the Bay Islanders? The Garifunas of San Juan Tela on the mainland have already experienced salt water intrusion in the area where they grew rice.

In the Bay Islands there has not been good control of environmental damage caused by modernization and the growing tourist trade. There have been problems with garbage and what to do with sewage. Permission is given to build hotels without analyzing if there is sufficient fresh water for these projects. The Bay Islands Conservation Association (BICA) has tried to work on some of these issues, for example instituting garbage pick up and campaigns on Roatan and Utila. People on Utila used to just throw their garbage into the sea, assuming the sea took it away. But it turned out the currents were such that they took the garbage to the Turtle Harbor Marine Park and Wildlife Reserve. On Guanaja garbage collectors just threw the garbage in a wetland, where it was eventually washed out to sea.

## Land Titles

The government has not taken seriously the problems that exist with land titles. For example, they built an extension to the airport and then made the decision to fence the new airport at Roatan without verifying who the owners of the affected land were. Many Bay Islanders lost valuable land in this process without being able to do anything about it.

Many Ladinos in search of new opportunities arrive on the ferry that operates between the Islands and the mainland. They frequently have nowhere to live when they arrive. Several years ago it was estimated that there was a housing shortage of at least a thousand housing units, mostly due to the increase in migration. The Ladinos invade the land of the Islanders, for example areas where they had their agriculture or land held by churches. Whole cities of Ladinos have been founded like Barrio Los Fuertes and Juticalpa. On Guanaja the Ladinos had invaded even the lands of the airport when they came to work in the reconstruction after Hurricane Mitch.

Other ethnic groups, like the Garifunas can appeal to the Honduran Institute of Agrarian Reform (INA) to solve their land title problems. The INA has said it has nothing to do with land titles in the Bay Islands because the lands are apt for tourist use (de vocacion turistica) and INA only gives land titles for the lands used for agriculture (de vocacion agricola). The Honduran Institute of Tourism wants nothing to do with land titles. Some of the lands, such as a Garifuna request for lands on Cayos Cochinos (Hog Keys), are in protected areas. The Honduran Corporation for the Development of Forestry (COHDEFOR) is the government agency in charge of protected areas, even marine reserves and parks. COHDEFOR does not want to give land titles either.

After almost 9 years of negotiations when the Garifunas have tried to obtain land titles in Hog Keys, the central government said, "Yes we want this land to be titled to them." They requested the Municipal Land Registry Office of Roatan to register the land title, but the office refused. (Report of Celeo Alvarez Casildo on garinet.com) There is no mechanism or office set up in the Honduran government to work on land title problems in areas where tourism is an important industry.

Part of the problem with lands is that the process to give land titles is not systematic. In the US, each county has a record of each piece of land within a certain area and it is possible to search the land title's history. This systemic mapping has not happened in Honduras. An architect in the Bay Islands said that if we could lay all of the land deeded in Roatan land titles end to end, we would have a place the size of Texas and not somewhere 30 miles long. This is because there are many land titles that overlap. There 2, 3, even land 4 land titles for the same piece of land. There are land titles that do not specify where the borders of the land is. There are documents in English transferring land title, which have not validity under Honduran law. There have been land sales with grant documents from Queen Victoria for lands when it was unclear if the Bay Islands belonged to England or Honduras. These also have no validity under Honduran law.

It is urgent to somehow revise the system of extending land titles. There have been projects of UNDP (United Nations Development Programmes) to help the Islands face the problems as the tourism develops there, but they have not improved this system.

Sometimes politics influences land loss in the Islands. Supposedly the way Barrio Los Fuertes was established is a candidate for Congress brought people from the Mainland and helped them to settle on land owned by the Methodist Church in exchange

for promises to vote for his party in the elections. Honduran congressmen also enjoy immunity from all prosecution, for example if they violate environmental laws.

### Environmental Protection Conflicts with Needs of Subsistence Fishermen

The Bay Islanders have made their living from fishing. There are estimates of 300-600 subsistence fishermen between Bay Islanders and Garifunas in the Islands. (There are two Garifuna settlements in the Bay Islands—Punta Gorda on Roatan and Hog Keys between Roatan and La Ceiba). But now large parts of the Bay Islands are in protected areas including all of the area around Hog Keys. There are conflicts about the right to fish and catch conch, lobsters, etc. The Hog Keys conflict has become known at the international level, because the Garifunas are protected by ILO Convention 169. They claimed the total prohibition of the ability to fish within 5 miles of Hog Keys which was done without their input into the planning violated their rights under this convention and was an attempt to move them from their traditional lands to help the dive resort on the Keys. Eventually a compromise was worked out that they could fish with certain methods a certain number of days of the week and they could have a land title. The Bay Islanders have not been able to work out these types of compromises in their favor.

Sometimes subsistence fishermen feel the pain of the limitations of fishing, but they are not the cause the problem. For example all 7 classes of marine turtles are off limits for hunting. But artisanal hunting of turtles is not the principal cause of decline. One problem is that the turtles will only lay their eggs in the dark on the beach where they were born. With the electrification of the Bay Islands, almost the only place that is dark for Turtles is Turtle Harbor on Utila.

Also people are throwing their garbage in the sea. The turtles mistake plastic bags for their favorite meal jellyfish, choke on them and die. Before there were turtle safe nets, shrimp boats accounted for the death of over a thousand sea turtles a year. If we prohibit the taking of all the sea turtles, instead of for example giving licenses to registered fishermen for one or two a year, than we lose the traditional recipes to make turtle soup and other foods. We could also lose the crafts that people make out of tortoise shell such as bracelets. Turtle fishermen knew a lot of lore about the turtles, which traditionally they would pass on to the next generation of turtle hunters.

The Garifunas say the same thing about fishing around Hog Keys. They say the damage to the eco-system there was caused by commercial fishermen, not by the small scale Garifuna fishermen. ILO Convention 169 is specifically designed to help preserve the livelihood of traditional fishing people, but it does not help the Islanders.

### The Most Endangered Species—Native Bay Island Children

The Bay Islanders of NABIPLA have said that they are afraid that the species most in danger of extinction on the Bay Islands are native Bay Islander children. They see with concern what has happened to native people on the Mayan Riviera (now without any Mayas) in Mexico or the Tela Bay project affecting the Garifuna communities near Tela.

In the name of national tourism development, native people are driven off their lands, their beaches, etc.

Tourism development in the Bay Islands has attracted thousands of Ladinos or Honduran Spanish speakers who are searching for new opportunities in hotels, bars, and restaurants. Already half the people on Roatan are Ladinos, a big change from 15 years ago. There is not a well defined project of bilingual intercultural education to conserve the culture and the language of the Bay Islanders, so the Bay Islanders are afraid they could disappear. They would like to limit in some way the immigration of Ladinos from the mainland towards the Islands. Those who do not find work right away may devote themselves to robbery, selling drugs, and/or poaching protected species. The relationship is not good between the two groups and is made worse in that they are not of the same religion. I have heard a priest in Flowers Bay preach on how Bay Islanders do not have God in spite of going to Church regularly and carrying and reading the Bible.

Faced with these difficult situations, the Bay Islanders have used different ways to try to improve their situation.

### **The Response of Bay Islanders**

1. They formed an ethnic federation to be their voice. This organization NABIPLA belongs a national organization for ethnic groups CONPAH.
2. They have asked for bilingual-intercultural education so that they do not lose their language and culture because of modernization and Ladino settlement in the Islands.
3. They have sought international aid. This became more available after Hurricane Mitch.
4. Bay Islands religious music was in danger of disappearing because there were no piano players in 14 churches. Bay Islanders started a music school in Roatan.
5. They started their own TV channel with messages different from the sex and violence on cable TV from the US. It is a Christian TV channel. This channel ha done shows on themes important to the Bay Islands like AIDS.
6. They were very active in the reconstruction after Hurricane Mitch.
7. They have tried to liaison with development programs in the Bay Islands so that they take into account the Bay Islanders. Some development programs in the Bay Islands such as APRODIB (Association pro the development of the Bay Islands) seem to work more with Ladinos in development projects than with Bay Islanders. Development programs for example do not hire many bilingual staff.

8. The Bay Islanders have tried to include the English speakers on the North Coast in their organization. They have tried to help Bay islanders who are on ships.
9. They have tried to establish communication tools to inform Bay Islanders about their situation, for example a NABIPLA newsletter.
10. They make complaints to the Human Right Commission and the Attorney General for Ethnic Groups for Bay Islanders.
11. Some of the people involved with BICA (Bay Islands Conservation Association) are Bay Islanders. Other people involved with it include foreigners and Ladinos living in the Islands.

## The Protected Areas of the Bay Islands

### Roatan

1. Sandy Bay Marine Park
2. West End Wildlife Preserve
3. Port Royal National Park

### Santa Elena

4. Biological Reserve Santa Elena

### Barbareta

5. Barbareta Wildlife Preserve

### Utila

6. Utila National Marine Park
7. Ragged Key Wildlife Preserve
8. National Marine Park and Wildlife Preserve “Turtle Harbor”

### Guanaja

9. Pines of Guanaja National Forest
10. Wildlife Preserve—Mangroves between Mangrove Bight and North East Bight

### Hog Keys

11. Hog Key Marine National Park

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