

Connecting Threads Research Project

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In a world where there is so many cultures and tradition one thing that happens to connect us all is our diversity. Through the latest songs, fashion, and even slang our society still manages to relate to one another despite or differences. Over the year's humanity continue to grow and revolve and with this happening our norms and acceptance is doing the same. Many people now have the option to choose whatever religion, culture, and traditions they may take on. Now although all the diversity in this world is such an amazing and beautiful experience this may also bring many confrontations among people who may oppose, and this is also when "culture appropriation" also comes into play. Take for instance there was a period of where the dashiki (African printed shirt) was trending and in style, everyone wore them and even the most popular celebrities did as well. Another time when another culture became popular was when many people and influencers decided to partake on one of the most popular Caribbean festivals which is Trinidad and Tobago carnival. In both scenarios it caused people associated within these cultures very upset and accusing many of using others culture and traditions as a nothing but a commodity. Nevertheless, if it wasn't for society contribution of receptiveness and allurements the world wouldn't be as diverse as it is now, it is obvious that different cultures and traditions will continue to broaden down into the future generations.

Description and Relevant Background

One culture we will focus on today is the **Garifuna people**. The Garifuna people originated from West Africa and was taken from their homeland by Spaniards to be sold as slaves,

however in 1635 during the route to their new “homes” they were up against a very bad tropical storm and some of the slave owners and the Garinagus perished during the shipwreck. Fortunately, there were some survivors that sought refuge and avoiding potentially being enslaved again on the island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, eventually they intermarried with the Arawak’s already residing on the island and that was the beginning of Garifuna people. As decades passed the Garifuna people continued to evolve on the island until they were faced with another set of issues. The Garifuna people leader known as chief Joseph Chatoyer (Sayute for short) was met against the French who wanted to rule over the land and his people but being the leader that he was, he wasn’t going down without a fight. This of course led to years of war until in 1795 Chief Joseph Chatoyer was killed during the fight and the Garifuna people surrendered and were exiled and sent to the island of Balliceaux. While the Garifuna people stay on the island, they faced starvation, illnesses and death due to the lack of resources in order to survive. Eventually they were all separated, as promised by the French treaty if the Garinagus lost the war and they were scattered all over Central America (Honduras, Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador). All five countries still happen to be home of the Garifuna people. There they learned new accustoms, due to all the migrating, intermarrying, and being under the rule of many different people Garifuna’s speak a total of four languages which are Garifuna (has some French words incorporated within the language) Spanish, Patois, and English. They also acquired many different foods and other adaptations but on we will focus on is a piece of clothing that has a big influence on the Garinagu known as the “**gounu**”. A gounu is simply means a gown and it can come as either a colorful dress or a top and long to medium skirt, this outfit is typically worn during spiritual rituals called a “**dugu**”.

Analysis

To introduce the gounu more, as mentioned this outfit is worn during the spiritual ritual known as the dugu. A dugu is a ritual that the Garinagu people holds as homage to their ancestors and relatives that has passed on into the next life. The ritual can take about 6-12 months to plan to depend on how the family decides to have it and their needs for it, this ritual can also take about a week. The dugu is usually helped plan by someone called a **“buyei”** in English terms this person would be called a shaman. The buyei is responsible for catering to the spirits needs such as relating messages, providing the medicinal baths (for preparation purposes) to the family members, and making sure that no evil spirits may intervene during the ritual. The family job is to make sure that everyone from the immediate side is to be in attendance and in uniform which bring us to the gounu. The gounu represents the unity within the family, each family member is to have this uniform including the men however the men outfits consist of a head tie, shirt, and shorts. This uniform can come in many different colors and designs which usually depends on the family preference. The gounu can also be worn in folklore dance routines, and Garifuna traditional parties called **“fedus”**. Overall, the gounu has a very big influence on the Garifuna people and their culture as it seen worn at a lot of important events to the Garinagu, this outfit does happen to play a very big role to the Garifuna social life. The gounu also shows a form of respect and maturity especially for young girls and is almost like a “rite of passage” when it isn’t being used for a much more serious event. The gounu mainly has a bigger influence on females within the culture which is why it’s associated to them the most. During an interview I held with my grandmother she mentioned that in stories that was passed down, it was also said that during the war with the French and Garinagus, the men used to disguise themselves in wearing the

gounus whenever they would perform an ambush and happened to work on many occasions. The outfit continues to have such a big influence within the culture as its still one of the most respected traditions and still passed down generation after generation.

Conclusions

In essence, the gounu has a very big impact on the Garifuna people however from a personal view it has also influenced me as well. Before my knowledge of the gounu I really had a different understanding of my culture and the importance of certain things within it. I was just seven years old when I received my gounu and attended my very first dugu, the experience was scary yet intriguing because I was exposed to something outside my American accustoms. Ever since I always been in the loop in knowing more about my culture and its tradition and yes even the ones I oppose of! Being in a country where most of my norms were introduced did have me feel lost in a sense because I felt like I was the same amongst the people I was surrounded so being introduced to my roots has brought a reminder of who I am and where I come from. During this research my biggest take away was interviewing my grandparents and listening to their stories and experience. For one I realized how fortunate I was to be retaining all this information from them especially because they are the oldest and living generation in my family. Secondly, I learned new accustoms that I look forward to in implementing in my life and hopefully with my future family. This project overall has shown me that without culture the world wouldn't be what it is today. It has also made me question what our future generations will take up on from our past generations and if they will come up with some new traditions of their own. Speaking with my grandparents and coming up with some inferences we predict that a lot of the Garifuna

traditions will eventually die out because of the lack of knowledge and information being passed down. This is why it's crucial that we always connect back to our roots and to make sure we enrich not only the youth but ourselves about who we are. This project has also shown me how connected we may be to people outside our culture. I say this because just like the gounu being a semi "rite of passage" it reminded of women who wear the "sari". It has so much different representations that may seem not of a big deal to others but can actually be a major influence on one's culture So, to end this research I would like to say no matter what age you are it's definitely okay to find out more about yourself beyond your interest and what you know. Be open minded about learning about the people before you and their history overall, get accustomed to some traditions and even inform others outside your culture just like were doing right now. By doing this we're adding more diversity and connecting ourselves by something as little as the threads on our backs.

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