

Luciano, New Orleans, Louisiana

Ben: Tell me your name

Luciano: Uh, to the camera or facing you.

Ben: No just talk to me. None of this is here. We're just having a conversation.

Luciano: Ok. Uh, well my name is Luciano Valencia and Luciano is spelled L-U-C-I-A-N-O
Valencia is spelled V-A-L-E-N-C-I-A

Ben: Ok and tell me about...I want to start hearing your story. Tell me about the store, tell me about the restaurant, like that stuff.

Luciano: Um, well, the whole idea about having a restaurant, well we wasn't generally trying to open a restaurant. We were trying to open more of a sports bar, a club type feel for pretty much Hondurans and Garifunas because in New Orleans we don't have a place that we can call our own. So my sister, she brings—she generally brings artists from New York and other places to do concerts with her, at least once a month so I was like why are we renting out different halls if we can have own place? So that's when the idea came along. So we stumbled upon this place and then it had a kitchen and so I was like well, we might as well open a restaurant too. You know. So, that's how the idea came about.

Ben: Nice

Luciano: Yeah

Ben: What was the inspiration behind it. Why, well you said you didn't have a place. Why do you need a place?

Luciano: A place meaning like why do we need a...Well, we needed something that we could call our own, pretty much, a place where everybody can come—you know—that's why we put the mix on the name Gary Mix because it's a mixture of all type of people. You don't generally have to Honduran. We have people from Jamaica come over here. We have people—Hatians, uh, a few French people come out here every now and then. You know, it's a mix—a mixify. So we wanted one place where everybody can just come and —you know—enjoy the different cultures and stuff like that, you know.

Ben: What have you—You've heard a lot of talk —Um— you probably know Bernardo Guerrero?

Luciano: Yeah

Ben: We've heard a lot of talk from different people that say, 'Ok Bernardo's starting like a—kind of an—organized group a group and that sort of thing.

Luciano: Yeah

Ben: Tell me about like organization of the Garifunas group that's here in New Orleans is there an organization, like what's

Luciano: Well, well yeah. It-it—There is an organization that pretty much—um we had it before, but it wasn't quite as organized as we're trying to get it now. We're pretty much we're trying to get it where more and more people can find out about us because not too many people know about the Garifuna culture to begin with. So we decided to organize the group and have one person or two leaders that can bring the group other places and meet people and do certain events and things like that so it can get out there pretty much, yeah.

Ben: What—what do you see as the value—this is kind of coming from me as like an outsider—

Luciano: Yeah.

Ben: Like what do you think is the value of as an outsider knowing about the Garifuna people?

Luciano: Um...I would say to kind of get a knowledge about—that there are different cultures out there. Um, we're not in a lot of text books, a lot of, you know documentaries per se and people pretty much don't know about the language or the culture about us so that's important to us because, at one point, we started to lose that culture. You know...the new generation wasn't adapting to it and there was um just wasn't trying to keep the culture alive. And that's why this organization is so important to keep, you know, the new generation that's coming up, still interested in— in the culture and still knowing the background of it and to not forget about it. Because it's—it's almost to a point where there's going to be a wipe out mat, you know. So, we just trying to keep it alive.

Johnson: says something muffled

Ben: Yeah that's what I was going to ask, was, "What have you seen?" Like what difference happens as a result?

Luciano: Um...Well...um the group the organization that's out here in New Orleans, um the, since we started it, since we organized it, per se, early last year, we've been getting a lot more calls to do different events and a lot more people are more interested in it. Like, um, the Punta Group, the Garifuna group that does the drums and the dancing, now they're doing at least two to three shows a month now, that we getting invited to, you know, to do. So, it's getting out there. A lot of people are starting to find out about it and being interested in it. Pretty much just like you guys find out about us, you know. So, because before you wouldn't even know that we existed, obviously, you know. So...

Johnson: question muffled something about culture

Luciano: Yeah, it's going to keep the culture from dying out, because um, more and more people are going to find out about it. More and more people is finding out about it and uh it's getting out there, you know.

Johnson: This is about culture...working to preserve it.

Luciano: Um...

Johnson: you can talk to me....

Luciano: OK

Johnson: I might ask

Luciano: Um, the culture, it's really important to us to keep it alive because that's where we come from. That's what we know, you know, and that's pretty much it. We don't want to lose our history behind it. That's more important to us, you know.

Ben: No worries... are you getting any noise from this necklace?

Johnson: It's not the necklace no. It's coming from...

Ben: um tell me, how do you uh. How do you advertise your events? How do you...

Luciano: um

Ben: What are you doing to get the word out?

Luciano: We do a lot of fliers. Um, a lot of word of mouth. We use the internet, and throughout the different events that we do per month, we try to already have something in writing about the next event that we doing or that we were going to do so we kind of keep it all going. But we use a lot of Facebook. We use a lot of fliers and youtube videos and uh things like that.

Ben: I guess what kind of response have you seen about it on Facebook. Are people talking about it? Are they...

Luciano: Yeah, a lot of people are talking about it. A lot of people are more interested in it. The more they find out about it, they more interested they are in it. Like, this Saturday, we have a big event, uh with the uh Garifuna group from New York that's just coming in town yesterday and today and um and I have a whole—a lot of people that's coming to see it that never heard of it. Just because of the videos I'm showing them, the pictures, and they're interested in finding a lot more about it. So.

Ben: What do you think drives that interest?

Luciano: Uh, something new, something they've never seen—well at least live in person before—and it's a, it's a different culture that no one really knows about.

Ben: I want to ask you some questions about some, kind of your personal idea. Did you grow up here in New Orleans?

Luciano: Yeah, I grew up here in New Orleans.

Ben: Tell me about growing up here in the U.S. as a Garifuna—I mean you're in a —you're in a black community essentially

Luciano: right

Ben: Tell me about, how was that?

Luciano: Uh growing up, it wasn't really much of a difference because, unless I tell a person that I'm Garifuna, they wouldn't even know. You know, unless they come in my house and see my mother talking, you know, a different language, that's the only way they would know. But other than that, it's—it really—it didn't make a difference, to tell you the truth. Um...some people like I feel my cousins, my aunts, and my uncles, that are, that are just coming out here, it's kind of hard for them because they don't know the English language very well. They don't know they American culture too well, so it takes—it's a little bit harder for them to adjust than me per se. I pretty much grew up out here since I was three years old, so this is what I know. When I started to forget about the culture, before I forgot —uh when I started to forget the Garifuna language, what my sister and my mom did was send me to Honduras for about a year, you know so I wouldn't forget it. So that's how I never forgot it ever since then. So yeah.

Johnson: [[muffled voice]] if you could answer anything. If you were to describe what is the Garifuna culture, to somebody who didn't know what it was, what are some of the things that are unique to Garifuna culture that are not, that are different than say black culture or latino culture, or any of those?

Luciano: Um..the difference between the culture is—let me see, that's kind of a hard question. Uh the difference between our culture is it has so many—so many levels and, and heritage behind it, you know. Because you can't just say we come from one place or we originated from Africa. You know, a lot of people would think that, but no, it's—it wouldn't be the case, you know. We do a lot of ritual dances that other cultures don't do. We do a lot of uh interactive with dancing and music and it's just so many parts to it that I, you know, it's hard to explain unless you would see it, you know. So that—that would be the key thing about it.

Johnson: [[muffled voice]]

Luciano: The thing—the most important thing for Garifunas is keeping the old herigate alive because um the dances that Garifunas do, the new generation is starting to forget about it. So, that's the biggest things for Garifunas is to keeping that heritage alive, you know. Like I said, the new generation is starting to forget about it. So.

Ben: Why is that important? What is that—why is that heritage meaningful?

Luciano: It's meaningful because you wouldn't know your future unless you know your past and still know where you come from. So, uh, forgetting about the culture would be wiping us completely off the map, you know. It—it's very important to keep it alive too, you know. Cause there's not too many Garifunas uh really out there. So.

Ben: What do you see in—What do you see as a future of the Garifuna in 20 years—50 years?

Luciano: Um

Ben: What do you think the culture will be to people outside of it?

Luciano: Well we trying to get it world wide, you know. Not just here and in a few different states because we're mostly known um in New York, California, and we just starting to really get known out here in New Orleans. So we trying to get it where it's world wide. Everybody knows about us. Uh and per se more documentaries are being made from it and um bring it out to the open, out to the life.

Johnson: [[muffled voice]] What are the differences and what do they have in common?

Luciano: Uh—the differences are—um—the things that they have in common will be—um—it will be the same thing, to tell you the truth. Um, the way people live in Honduras, the Garifunas in Honduras, is almost similar to the way they live out here. They still do the same foods. They still do the same dances, the same music, and uh the differences will be they're more into the culture in Honduras than we are here. Out here, we're basically trying to keep up with the culture in Honduras. You know, there's a lot of different dances that they do in Honduras that they don't do out here and the reason for that is because um the dances, it pretty much involves the culture around you, you know your environment. So that's why they don't do those dances out here. Because, here in the states, it's like you know, there's a dance that they call, "Busuluma" and that dance involves dressing up in Halloween costumes and uh, and dancing to a rhythm on a beat that they do with the drums, and a lot of people scared of it. If they do it out here, they're gonna be like 'oh what is going on? What is that?' and then people will be kind of scared of it. So that's why we don't do that certain dance out here, but they do it in Honduras, yeah.

Ben: um you had a question.

Johnson: What do you know uh, talk to me. Every Garifuna we've ever crossed, that always seems to be really really important to them. Like, they're really connected with their aunts and uncles and grandparents

Luciano: Oh yeah

Johnson: and cousins and and all of that. How do you feel about that. Talk to me a little about that and how that might be different from the American culture?

Luciano: Um, that's important because um when you pretty much do your family tree and link up pretty much every person in your family tree, it's like all of us are kin in some kind of way, you know. If it's my great great grandmother, my great great grandfather, it kind of links back to—it's pretty much like a triangle, you know it starts off separating and then when you get deeper into your family tree, it links to one person. And uh, that's why a lot of family members like cousins, uncles, aunts, they're real close, you know and we have to stay close. We don't really have a choice but to stay close because we the only ones that's gonna keep us strong—and keep the heritage going, you know. It's very family oriented.

Johnson: I've done some interviews with—with uh Garifuna in other places and they've talked a little bit about Garifuna spirituality and their ancestors and things like that

Luciano: Yeah

Johnson: Tell me a little about that and its impact on you

Luciano: Um, about that, I wouldn't really know too much about. I know, uh, in Honduras, they do a ritual where um—where they trying to contact—they trying to get in contact with their loved ones that passed away and and and and—and they feel like they are trying to get, you know, get information from them, you know. They do a ritual dance where they put out food, uh liquor or whatever kind of beverage that person used to like. They put it out and they do a dance around it to kind of feel that person still being there. You know, and, and that person that's trying to contact that family member, um pretty much fills himself up with the memories of the past one and kind of revives them through that person. And um, uh that's pretty much what I know about that part, the ancestors and the rituals and things like that. Because they don't really do too much of that out here. They do more of that in Honduras.

Ben: [[muffled]]

Luciano: Um they do that out there, um,

Johnson: Why not here?

Luciano: because the laws we have out here. Um, for example, let me give you a quick example. Uh, when a person passes away, they do um, this ritual called velorio. Um they pretty much dress the person that passed away up and have them laying on his bed and people will come see him. It's almost like when you've viewed a body before, before they burry the body, well they do that at the house, right after the person has passed away, and people will come in. The family members will come in and see the person and grieve over the person and they do the dances and—in celebration of the um person that just passed away before they take him to the funeral home and things like that. They body will be at the house for a day or two before they do all of that, and out here, you can't do that. You know, you just can't keep a body in your house for two days after they've passed away, you know. That's why they do it out there, not out here, you know. That would be the big difference.

Johnson: Do you think that some of those uh some of those traditions with the ancestors, do you think that some of that strengthens the ties to families, even here, even though you don't do those customs any more.

Luciano: Yeah, um we don't do them out here, but in a sense we're trying to kind of bring it out here, in a way and the only way we can do that is if we keep the family tight and um, um in a sense, um, yeah. We're really trying to keep that culture that they do out there, in a sense bring it out here. You know we can't do it exactly how they do it, but in some kind of sense, kind of imitate it, close to how they do things in Honduras.

Johnsons: So like um, Garifunas will respect their elders um a whole lot more...

Luciano: OH YEAH

Johnson: ...than we do here.

Luciano: Oh yeah, that's one big thing, um you know how brothers and sisters they fight all the time, you know it don't matter if you're older than me, if you're my brother, I have to respect you no matter what. You know, it doesn't matter if—if we're fighting, I still have to listen to you. Whatever you say and things like that and the elders—We call the elders the—you know the grandfathers, the grandmothers, the wise ones. Um, because they lived the world. They know what is what and why people do what they do so, if they say don't do this, it's for a reason that they're saying it. You know, if um, whatever they say goes, you know. For instance, when um, out here in New Orleans when um, before Katrina hit, um, usually when a hurricane is coming this way, we would ride it out and we would stay, we wouldn't leave you know. We wouldn't leave the state or nothing like that because the hurricane will come and turn and go the other way. But Katrina, my grandma was like oh she knows something bad is gonna happen, and she's the only reason we left before the hurricane hit because my grandma felt that something bad was gonna happen. So yeah, the elders, we have to listen to them.

Johnson: So you guys don't like to put them in rest homes or anything like that?

Luciano: NO. No, no, no, no. The elders, stay with you until their last moments, you know. As far as putting them in a home, in Garifuna culture, that doesn't exist. That does not exist. Yeah.

Johnson: Do you watch a lot of TV?

Luciano: Uh, no. Since I started this business, I really don't know where the TV is.

Johnson: Do you think thats typical of Garifunas that they really don't watch that much TV or do you think they watch a lot?

Luciano: Uh, no, Garifunas generally don't watch TV, unless their soap operas are coming on at a certain time, but because in Honduras, you're mostly outside uh conversing with your families, with your neighbors and you're doing a lot of um, per se, events that's going on and you're more

of an outside person than an inside person when you're out there. So when they come out here, they kind of stick to that. So, yeah, they generally don't watch too much TV.

Johnson: Because I was gonna say, in a lot of TV, those values of respecting your elders and families sticking together,

Luciano: Yeah.

Johnson: those are kind of getting deteriorated in—in TV

Luciano: Yeah. Exactly. That's why they're trying to stay away from it. That's, uh what brings me back to the point that I made earlier. The new generation, they, well especially out here in the states, they're adapting more of the American way of life which is watching TV, and you know kind of have a laid back lifestyle—which in Honduras, you're pretty much with your family all the time. You're outside, doing this and doing that. You really don't have time to be inside and watch TV, you know.

Ben: What do you think is lost with this new generation that's adopting, I asked you, you call it "Western Values", this American sort of lifestyle

Luciano: uh-huh

Ben: What—What do those people lose?

Luciano: Uh, they lose a big part of their history, you know. They forget about their history and where they come from. And uh, that's pretty much it. you know. and history has a lot to do with Garifuna culture. That an important part of the Garifuna culture is their history, you know. So

Johnson: We were talking to some people that have said that in certain places they've had problems where, you know, a Garifuna would come along, you know, with the black community because blacks don't consider Garifuna black, they consider them Latinos.

Luciano: Yeah.

Johnson: And the Latinos wouldn't accept them because of their skin color. They're considered black and there's a problem that way. Do you see any of that?

Luciano: Uh-personally, no. I don't see it because, um, I grew up out here, you know. I'm accepted in the black community as well as the Honduran community, you know. Um, but other people because the way they talk or the way that they dress, it's kind of hard for them to be accepted by the uh black community. And um —(coughs) excuse me— the Latin community um I don't know we're—we're kind of—Hondurans and Garifunas—we're kind of a mixing pot, you know. I have a sister that if you didn't know her, you would think that she's Caucasian. You know, she has the white skin, blue eyes, but she's Garifuna, you know. So, it's like, as far as the Latin community, with the Garifunas, it's not too much trouble there. It's kind of adapting to uh, the black community that a lot of, uh a lot of them are not accepted in it, you know. Unless they

change the way that they're dressing or they learn the English language good, you know that's the only way, but, other than that, they're not too much of a conflict there, you know. Cause they kind of adapt to both the Latin and the black community, you know.

Ben: Thank you so much. You said some great stuff.

Luciano: (laughs)

Ben: I think uh, I'm trying to think back on anything else. I think I'm fresh out.

Luciano: (laughs) I answered pretty much...

Johnson: Yeah that's great.

Ben: That's perfect.

Luciano: Ok.