

## **Sarah England Interview: Aliso Viejo, California**

Ben: Ok. Um. We did test the audio. It looks like it's pretty good. And you'll just talk to me the entire time, as if the camera wasn't there and if Athena wasn't there. First of all, will you say and spell your name?

Sarah: Oh ok. It's Sarah England. S-A-R-A-H E-N-G-L-A-N-D.

Ben: Perfect and then what is your title here at Soka University?

Sarah: Um. Associate professor of Anthropology.

Ben: Ok, very good. Um, first of all tell me how your interest in the Garifuna started. Where does your story with the Garifuna begin?

Sarah: Well, I was an undergraduate student at UT Austin and I went on a field studies program in Guatemala and I.. we were actually in Antigua which is near Guatemala City studying Cachatikal, which is one of the Mayan languages. And one of the weekend trips that we made was to Livingston which is where the one Garifuna community in Guatemala and I just became really fascinated with, you know the place. I mean, I had been to Guatemala before. I'd been to Mexico. And I think when people think of Central America, they tend to think of you know, mestizos, ladinos, speaking Spanish and they think of you know in Guatemala they think of Maya and the highlands and it's cold and you know this. And then I went to Livingston and I always thought, I thought oh my gosh I'm in the Caribbean. This is totally different there was just this completely different feel. I had never really been exposed to that, so here I am in this country that mainly thinks of its... speaking about Guatemala right...primarily thinks of itself as mestizo and Spanish speaking or indigenous and then here I was around people who are you know Afro-Latinos and they're speaking Garifuna, they're speaking Spanish some of them were speaking Creole English you know. And then there were even you know some Maya that were speaking Creole English who live down there and it was just like. I thought it was really fascinating, just this mix, you know just this really hybrid mix of languages and cultures and it was kind of like what we call a border zone you know between the Caribbean and Central America. It felt like you were in the Caribbean, but you were in Central America. And so anyway. I became very fascinated with that, so I came back and my dissertation adviser Charles Hale who has worked on the mosquito coast in Nicaragua um he you know I told him that I was really fascinated with the Garifuna and everything and he said, well you should go to Honduras because a lot of people had done research already with Garifunas in Belize. There aren't very many in Guatemala, but there's a huge community, that's where the majority is in Central America are in Honduras. And really people don't work in Honduras, I think partially because you know Guatemala had a civil war, El Salvador had a civil war, you know there's a large indigenous population and people just haven't been that interested in Honduras and so that's how I ended up going to Honduras. Then, when I went to Honduras, I was fascinated once again by the fact that I saw so many people (noise) that have to take like six hour bus ride to get to this community, Limon is where I worked, it's

on the coast, it's kind of at the end of this road, this dirt road. Um. You know and it's very campesino, very rural, very peasant, and yet there's guys on the bus going from the city to the community wearing, you know New York Yankee t-shirts and hats and the gold chains and big Nike tennis shoes and it just it looked like I was in Brooklyn. You know. And you were still on this like dusty, broken down bus going to this little rural community in Honduras. And then so when I got to Limon I was really fascinated by the way that the New York culture, the connection to New York was so strong. Everybody I met had family in New York, they'd been to New York themse... a lot of people had been to New York themselves or they were going to go to New York. They had lots of clothes from New York, you know they would... it was just like New York was very much a part of the culture even though it was in this community that... and this was in nineteen ninety three had no electricity, people were still... they had water but it was kind of unreliable, you had still to use pumps and you know. And yet all I heard was New York. So it just seemed to me to be this kind of interesting mix of super urban, super rural, very you know cosmopolitan, but at the same time very isolated you know yeah, just kind of mix, so that's how I got interested in looking at immigration and so on and then another aspect of the Garifuna that's really interesting is how they are both indigenous in the sense that the language that they speak is an indigenous language from the Carib, but they're also black. And then living in, again, a country that thinks of itself as mestizo Spanish speaking. So that was also really interesting to me. So they just, they just inhabit so many different borders like, physical borders, cultural borders, linguistic borders, racial borders, you know that was what was really interesting to me.

Ben: Very good, great answer. I'm getting a little bit of a weird glare.

Sarah: Do you want me to take these off?

Ben: No, I like the glasses on. Um (cut)

Sarah: there were some of them that were just very broad.

Ben: That's fine, that's fine. If you don't feel comfortable answering, just say pass, throw it out. Um... I wanted to ask, just kind of while we're talking about it um. Talk a little bit more about the multiple identities, where it's like they relate with the blacks or the Hispanics. Can you expound on that?

Sarah: See, that's the last chapter um. Let's see um. Well, in Honduras like I said, one of the things people talk about in Central America and this is true in other parts of Latin America that I mean it varies slightly by country, but there's a sort of general um, national ideology of mestizaje right mestizaje meaning mixed in Spanish, so there's a sort of period that starts late eighteen hundreds, nineteen hundreds when these countries, most of Latin America became independent from Spain, sometime in the eighteen hundreds and they're starting to sort of create their sense of national identity and one of the things that most of the countries at some point did was sort of develop this idea of we are a mestizo nation we're mixed right. And the reason that they did that was because um on the one hand they need, they needed to claim part of the indigenous heritage because that's what roots you to

the nation, that's what makes you a real whatever, Venezuelan, Colombian, whatever right because the indigenous people were the original inhabitants right but at the same time there was still a legacy of racism toward the indigenous people. That the indigenous people were backwards and inferior and so on right, so they needed them symbolically to kind of you know make claims to belonging to the nation but at the same time they didn't really want to say we're pure indigenous cause then in the global community of nations at that time there was you know a hierarchy of racists. So what they would do is say, but we are also mixed with Spanish, so that gives us the ability to claim also European blood and culture and language and religion and so on and so forth, so we're mestizo. Well, the problem is, what do you do with Africans right because um indigenous people are symbolically important because they root you to the nation. Europeans, the Spanish mainly, with Portugese in one country are important because they root you to Europe which had the higher status in the world. But what do you do with Africans and some countries have a very large presence of Africans in some not so much. In Honduras there's actually several different kinds of descendants of Africans. You know, most countries have black slaves, African slaves at some point. Honduras didn't have a lot and they tended to kind of mix into the population early on. Then the Garifuna arrive in seventeen ninety seven and then later the banana companies bring in people from the West Indies so you have actually three different types right. So, there was an awareness that we do have afro hondurans, but we don't know what to do with them. Because the world is saying you know, being African is definitely at the bottom in terms of you know, the hierarchy of races during that period, the late eighteen hundreds and nineteen hundreds. We don't really want to claim 'em, but we can't exactly kick them out because they are citizens, so what do we do with that right. So there's historically been a lot of racism towards Afro-latinos in general, but definitely towards Afro-Hondurans. So on the one hand indigenous people... I mean, sorry Garifuna want to you know they want to claim that they're Honduran, they want to be part of this Honduran nation because that is where they're from, they're citizens of Honduras, but they've also felt this sort of rejection as Afro Hondurans. What happens in the 80's with the whole multiculturalism movement and then you know there's the uh decade of the indigenous peoples. Rigoberto Menchu from Guatemala is given the Nobel Peace Prize. There's this whole sort of idea that you know nations need to recognize all of the different groups and so on, but what happens in Central America is there's more recognition of indigenous people and again for that same reason that they are sort of rooted to the nation. Um and so what a lot of Garifunas can claim to be and so there's a lot of national legislation, there's a lot of international accords passed during this period that give special rights to indigenous people that recognize their importance to the nation and that they shouldn't be discriminated against and so on right. Well, because the Garifunas speak Carib, that's actually their language, they're mixed with Carib they can claim to be indigenous so they they they see themselves as Honduran, but within that they see themselves as a minority which is indigenous but at the same time they're not really indigenous in the eyes of a lot of people because in the eyes of a lot of people they don't think that you can be black and indigenous at the same time. Even though they claim that because of this cultural and racial mixture but for a lot of people those two things exclude each other. So there's also a lot of racism toward the Garifuna that is particular to the fact that they're black. So they also see themselves identifying with the larger African diaspora. So for example, like listening to reggae and you know being... Nelson Mendela is very

important to them, a lot of African American actors and things like that right. So they identify with the African diaspora, but they also identify as indigenous, but they also identify as Honduran. And then when they go to the United States, then what often happens is they come to be seen as Latinos. Right because they speak Spanish. The ones from Honduras. And from Guatemala and Nicaragua. The Belizeans on the other hand, speak English. So they tend to be seen more like in the group of West Indies, the West Indians, like people from Trinidad, Jamaica, and those islands right. So, so they're identity can really it can be different national identities, it can be Nicaraguan, Honduran, Guatemalan, Belizean from the U.S. right. It can be different racial identities, it can be, black, indigenous, and in this country we now say that Latino is not a race, but I think people still kind of talk about it as though it were. Right, but then you can get even more specific, you can say Afro-Latino, or Afro-Honduran or West Indian or Caribbean or right so, depending on where they are they can kind of articulate all of these different identities at the sa... you know at different moments, depending on who they're talking to, depending on what the context is and so on.

Ben: So I guess how do they um.. How do they reconcile that. I mean, I've read a little bit about flexible identities. Tell me, if you walk into somewhere how do you determine, how do the Garifuna determine and maybe you don't know. How do they determine whether I'm going to identify as African or Latino, how do they personally reconcile that flexible identity?

Sarah: Well, I've never actually asked anyone that, so I'd kind of just have to guess, but. I mean, first of all at the core is always, they are Garifunas. That's the thing that doesn't really change. Right, so it's kind of the core. And the other identities are really more about trying to to put yourself in racial categories created by other people and which which sometimes are the only ones that those other people recognize. They don't know what a Garifuna is. Right. I even met people from Honduras who were from the Southern Honduras and the Garifunas are on the Northern coast who who had left the country many years ago and they'd never even heard of the Garifunas, right so they're not always recognized and you go to like New Orleans and people didn't know... they don't know what it is. So instead of having to explain all the time you know and sometimes you know you're not in a situation right where you know you have that privilege of explaining what is a Garifuna. Then they take the more convenient racial category that people are going to recognize and that they also feel an affinity with for whatever reason. it could be, so for example in New York um there are Garifunas living in the South Bronx. They tend to sort of have more affinity with being Latino because there are a lot of other Afro-Latinos living in the South Bronx like from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, right. Whereas in Harlem, which is where I was living actually when I lived there to do research there's a lot more affinity with being black because That's you know you have African Americans, you have African immigrants, right. And these are people you know who right next to each other, right across the river right. Um so it's also... it's kind of like you know it could be seen as kind of logistical like where am I going to be least harassed. Right. For whatever reason. It could be immigration reasons, it could be racism reasons or whatever um but it also has to do with kind of a sense of affinity who more accepts me, you know sometimes people are more accepting because of the language, you know we share the same language

it doesn't matter what color you are sometimes people are more accepting because of color. I don't care what your language is we're all black say or whatever. So you know all of those things are I think I think things that people are kind of taking into consideration. I'm not sure how consciously they are. Probably we all do it all as well when we find ourselves in a situation. I don't think they're unique except that they're put in that situation more often than like us like you or me.

Ben: Interesting, this is fascinating. You're saying wonderful things like we talked to um. A lady just two hours ago and she said some of the same, similar things that you've observed.

Sarah: Oh good.

Ben: Which is fascinating, it's very interesting to me. Um where was I going to go after this. I wanted to ask kind of a follow up question about um oh kind of you're an outsider to this organization. I think I have a question in here somewhere about that. But if you were to describe the Garifuna I mean how would you do it. What what that's really broad. Um like walking into this culture what impressions did you have what what things did you learn from it, what what did you take away.

Sarah: Oh yeah, that was one of the ones I wasn't sure how to answer. Umm.

Ben: I mean, what were your first impressions as you walked into this community, this organization?

Sarah: I honestly don't remember. Um I think, I think that once you're once you're in you know a community for long enough those things that maybe impressed you at first just become ordinary so you don't really notice them anymore. So I'm not really sure how to answer that um. yeah.

Ben: That's fine.

Sarah: I mean I think actually what I told you before about how i got interested, those were kind of the first things that impressed me yeah.

Ben: No worries,

Sarah: But those are a little bit maybe more academic things that impressed me. You know they were academically interesting to me. I don't know

Ben: That's ok. That's fine. Um. I liked, I especially liked one of your statements. You said while the Garifuna transnational community transcends borders and manifests continuities it is also shaped by the social and economic conditions of the location its members reside. We kind of talked about that a little bit um. Were there things in specific that you saw in New York that the people were just like, say it was the Nike kind of shoes or whatever that they were just kind of absorbing this American culture? Anything in particular that you saw?

Sarah: Um. That's an interesting question because well. First of all, anthropologists have really reworked the whole idea of culture. Right, so I mean what is the diff... like where would you make the division between what's Garifuna and what's American? I mean, they've been the pe.. Garifuna people have been living in the United States since the nineteen forties and you know as I talk about in the book they don't just come, settle and then cut off all ties. I mean there's this constant sort of circulation of people so. At some point things that may be in the nineteen forties were not really a part of Garifuna culture that were unique to the United States have now become a part of Garifuna culture. So it's kind of hard to know where to draw that line. I think that as an outsider as you said, someone who's not Garifuna, one of the things that, I guess an impression now that you asked me that, I can kind of remember one of the things that kind of I thought was interesting when I went to New York was... and again I don't think this is unique to the Garifuna, I know a lot of people in New York, a lot of immigrant communities especially in New York are like this and New York kind of lends itself to this, you know is that i was actually surprised at at how so many things that I take for granted as part of American culture they they didn't really participate in. So, for example um, you know the house I was living in was in Harlem which is and on a hundred and twenty fifth and that's only what fifteen blocks from Central Park, and I couldn't get anyone to go with me to Central Park. Which to me is just like, you're in New York, you live fifteen blocks from Central Park, you know why not go it's just, you know. But that just wasn't interesting to them. I mean this is the people that I knew. I'm not going to say speak for the whole community but and the other thing was like food for example. You know, in New York you can eat any food from any part of the world, but people were pretty limited in what they wanted to eat. It was either Garifuna food or Dominican food which is pretty similar. And maybe Chinese every once in a while because Chinese restaurants and like you know everywhere in the world so I mean even like at a Garifuna wedding one of the standard dishes is often Chow mein right because it's just so integrated into the. But you know, so for me that was kind of strange as someone again coming from Austin Texas you know I don't know, to me that's part of American culture is this being where, for us you know any food is is really becomes American food eventually or whatever, so to me it seemed like they were kind of insular in that sense. Um but after being there for a while I sort of realized that some of that was because of economics, it's just it's expensive to do some of those kinds of things, right. Um and some of it had to do with you know just again I think this sense of we're a very small community in a sea of other kinds of immigrants. And you know, there was this extreme desire to interact with other members of the Garifuna community that was their main social life. And I think because everywhere they turned there was some sort of misunderstanding. So, with African Americans, it's why are you speaking Spanish. With Latinos, it's that you're black. With with you know Anglo americans, what's a Garifuna I don't, they don't even know you know. And so I think that, my impression was that that kind of was an incentive to just sort of say you know best we you know we just kind of interact with each other because these are people that understand. Even with other Hondurans, there was a kind of tension because the Garifunas actually are very predominant in New York in the Honduran community. And there seemed to be like. I'd go to some meetings sometimes and there seemed to be kind of resentment towards them from Hondurans. You know why... everyone at the meeting is mainly Garifuna so what do

you think you run the organization.... you see what I'm saying? So everywhere they would turn they would kind of be this... wall of, you know, something, I don't know, so I guess that was, that was kind of my impression. But, I mean, they live in the United States so obviously they're going to watch TV and buy a lot of the same consumer products, you know, they celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas and I mean, similar to the way people do in the United States and... kids go to school, they learn English, you know, I mean...

Ben: Have you ever seen any like, because they've kind of integrated those things, have you seen people move away from... if this is core Garifuna culture food and all of that, have you seen them move away from that core into this American Society? Or are they adapting that into their core? Does that make sense?

Sarah: Well first of all you have to keep in mind I think that the majority of the people who I interviewed and worked with and lived with were first generation. So, they, you know, grew up mainly in Honduras and then came to the United States. And I, almost everyone I've ever met since then, from any country, in that kind of situation, they still really want to eat the food that they're used to eating and listen to the music that they're used to and, you know, watch TV in their language and, you know, and that sort of thing. So, you know, I think that, I don't know, again... now I'm sorry I've lost the question.

Ben: Yeah, no worries. Um, yeah no worries. Just, whether they've taken it and integrated it or they're moving more toward it? That sounds like...

Sarah: Toward it. Uh, US culture?

Ben: Toward the US culture.

Sarah: Oh. Well again, because I was working with first generation immigrants I didn't really, I didn't really see that. But, you know, that generally happens second, third, sometimes even fourth generation. I mean this is true for most immigrant groups, right, so again in that sense the Garifuna are not really unique. And, and again, one of the things that, um, I think, keeps the culture fresh is the fact that there's this constant influx of new people coming from Honduras right, so if you compare, for example, European immigration from the late eighteenth hundreds, um, that was also true. They were always new people coming in and so those ethnic communities like, you know, that we, that, for example still exist a lot of them in New York, places like New York, they were constantly reinfused with the language and the religion and the culture and the food and everything from these new immigrants. But then, and I think it was the nineteenth twenty's, the United States passed the, uh, country quotas. They said "Ok, only so many people from each country can come in" and the flow from Europe, for different reasons, kind of slowed down or stopped. Um, and so that's when, now the second, third generation started to be, you know, kind of more integrated to US culture because, you know, that influx, and in those days you didn't have the internet and you didn't have planes, and you know, all that stuff that you have now. So, so now, I mean, it's very easy to continue to, you know, be very active in the Garifuna community no matter where you are in the United States because, you know, there's always new people coming in, you can travel really quickly and fairly cheaply, um, there's the internet, you

know, there's all these mechanisms that people have to really maintain a sense of community, you know, there's that... Even if the flow of actual immigrants got cut for whatever reason, I still think that there's still that ability to participate in the culture virtually through, you know, online, if nothing else. But I don't think the flow is going to be cut either. They tend to just break down by race. Or, not, or not even, it could...it... for like Hondurans, they, the ones who come from Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, the, the census probably classifies them as Latino and then they're sticking the Belizeans with black because they speak English, right? So just to know how many are in the United States isn't even very easy and then, of course, there's a lot, you know, that are undocumented so there's that problem too but... so there's not very many of them, compared to, you know, some of like, the more well known immigrant groups then they, they also, you know, as you know are kind of spread out so you have LA, New Orleans, there's actually quite a few Belizeans in Chicago, um, in New York, and there's, there's a significant amount in Miami to. So they kind of are, you know, New York, Miami, and Houston, New Orleans, Chicago, LA, San Francisco is also another place where there are, there's a significant amount. So they're kind of spread all over the place, the few, you know, and...

Ben: So what keeps them together? Like, what keeps the language together? What, I mean, it almost seems like they're so spread out and so thin, what is keeping their culture together?

Sarah: Well, again, I would say I mean I think, I think it still goes back to this, this sense of, um, wanting to be recognized for who they are. I mean, I think, like if you're from Mexico for example, maybe you don't, you don't have to work super hard to be a part of the Mexican community cause it's so longstanding in the United States, it's so numerous, um, there's just, you have a lot of resources, you know, to, to, if you want to maintain a Mexican identity let's say, um, even the other Central American groups like Guatemalans and, and, Salvadorans have very large communities in LA and DC and different places and, and so it's just, it's just, you know, there's, it's not that difficult. But for the, for the Garifuna, because they're such a small group, because they're so easily mixed mixed up or confounded with something else, people always think they're something else, then I think that drives people to really want to, you know, be... they're very proud of who they are, and they really want people to understand, you know, who are Garifunas, right? Another thing that, and, and this is actually common, also you see this, um, with, with the West Indians is that, um, as blacks, you know, there's still a lot of racism towards blacks in the United States and there's a lot of studies that show that immigrant blacks, especially those who, well, yeah, immigrant blacks I mean who speak like, um, something other than standard American English. So they could still speak English but like say they speak with like a Caribbean accent or something like that, actually face less racism than African Americans. So there's like comparative studies that look at educational levels and income and different things like that say between West Indians and African Americans in the same neighborhoods and a lot of times the West Indians have better demograph... you know, better socio and economic indicators. They also, they've done studies that show that whites tend to be more comfortable with West Indians than with African Americans. I think because, there's, there's this tension of, you know, who's discriminating against whom. Whereas West Indians tend to come with a little more... well they're not from the United States so they're not, you know, seeing whites as



the enemy I suppose necessarily, right? And I think, so, a lot of people argue that, a lot of times, for immigrant blacks, whether they're from Africa or the West Indies or, you know, or Latin America, there's, there's actually an advantage to making sure that people understand you're not an African-American i.e. you weren't, you're not from that, that heritage. Also, the fact that the Garifunas were not really slaves, they've been independent basically since the formation of their society, that's also something their very proud about and they want people to know that as well, and that is also, I think, a lot of times, gives people a different view of them. So a lot of the stigma and a lot of the stereotypes, the negative stereotypes that are attached to African Americans, the Garifunas don't have that because they didn't grow up here, they didn't have that history of slavery, you know, um, and they have a different culture, and so on.

Ben: That's great. They've talked a lot about that.

Sarah: Yeah. We're not... the thing I heard a lot was "We're not just blacks". Yes, they're black, it's not that they don't, they don't say "We're not black". They don't deny that, but they want to add onto that. (Laughs) Yes we're black, but, but then there's you know, we have this culture, we have this different history, we have this different language and that makes them unique and, yeah

Ben: Definitely. You kind of talked, you touched on this a little bit but I want to know, how can an understanding of these people help everyday people, I mean, most people have never heard of these, these Garifuna. How can this understanding help an individual, just an off the street individual?

Sarah: Well if you're talking about an off the street individual from the United States, I would say... the first thing is that the Garifuna are a great example of how our ideas about race are way too simplistic. The categories that we use, the main ones right, so you're either white, black, native american, asian, or african-ameri... er no wait, sorry, latino, right? Ok. And somehow in the US people have generally also seen these as mutually exclusive categories, right, so there's a limited number, they're mutually exclusive, and then we have all kinds of stereotypes that we attach to those categories, right, so if you're Latino, oh, you must be in this part of the country, we would assume you're mexican and you eat this and blah, blah, blah, ok. So what, what I think, the really great thing about learning about the Garifuna is that you realize that those racial categories are super super simple. And they don't encapsulate the massive complexity that really exists in term of the kinds of people that are out there and how, you know, being black doesn't mean XYZ, it can mean all this other stuff as well, um, being latino doesn't mean, you know, all those stereotypes that people have, it can mean all this other stuff as well. Um, so that's one thing I think is really important, is it, it really breaks down our simplistic notions about racial categories, ethnic categories, the, just the connection between skin color and culture and language and all those different things. The Garifunas just break all kinds of, you know, assumptions that people have about all that stuff. Um, I would say, another thing that, that I really think is important and we haven't really talked about this yet, but, and this is again not just, not really unique to the Garifuna but because I lived with them, I really got to know their stories and really, you know, and and a lot of depth. And as immigrants, I think it's really

important to understand the way that people from Central America are very much caught between two governments that are really not doing much to help them. So, for example, one of the things I really realized is, you know, living in a place like Honduras and especially being an ethnic minority, the government is not really doing anything to improve their socio-economic situation. In the 90's there was, there were a lot of things written on paper, the government signed the Convention one69 of the International Labor Organization which says that, you know, indigenous peoples, which the Garifuna are classified in that, have certain rights... they've passed anti-discrimination laws, they, you know, there's all... but it's all on paper, (laughs) and when it really comes down to... when they actually go and demand, "Ok look you signed this document, here, you know, we have the right to, uh, for you to come and and and make sure that we have enough land or, you know, or there's no discrimination" or whatever it is, then the government doesn't respond. So, you know, so for a lot of these people they're really really struggling... and then there was Hurricane Mitch in nineteen ninety eight, um, right now Narco trafficking is a big problem in Central America and that's just pushing a lot of people out of the country and the governments really not, is not doing anything to help, if anything it's making it worse. Then they come to the United States and then they face a whole new set of, challenges, right, especially if they're undocumented. Um, but even if they're not, I mean even if they're documented, you know they come here with papers, then their still all kinds of issues about, you know, unemployment rates and discrimination and, and so on... and so that was one of the things I really really learned to appreciate was how hard these people work to, you know, to try to make ends and maintain families. You know, and that they're really kind of stuck, I guess you could say, like between a rock and a hard place. If the rock is Honduras and the hard place is the United States and they're, you know, they're doing their best but neither country is really, in terms of laws, you know, is really, you know, giving them full opportunities, I think. So that was another thing... but again that's not, that's true I think for Central Americans in general but especially for those who are facing even extra discrimination because they're indigenous or because they're, they're, you know, African descent.

Ben: You've done your homework.

Sarah: I've done my homework (laughs). Well, you know I started in 90, nineteen ninety,so...

Ben: Wow. (Audio, light stuff). Are you too hot?

Sarah: I'm sweating but it's okay.

Ben: You're sweating.

Sarah: As long as I'm not sweating on my face (laughs).

Ben: Um, yeah, so where did this connection start. In your book, you kind of talked about the banana farms and that sort of thing... kind of give me a brief history of this connection between Central America and the Unites States as it relates to the Garifuna.

Sarah: Um...

Ben: Is that too complicated?

Sarah: Yeah, well I mean Central America and the US that's a long, complex history.

Ben: As it relates to the Garifuna.

Sarah: I guess, for the Garifunas it really begins in the nineteen, well early nineteen hundreds was when the fruit companies, so like, so the famous United Fruit but there was also Standard Fruit and Sumayel Fruit Company, I think that's what it was called... um, started operations, um, in, again in Guatemala and Honduras and Nicaragua and Costa Rica, eventually in Panama, so they were really all throughout but, uh, Honduras was one of the first places that they went to and I don't know, you know, the term Banana Republic was, you know, actually coined by O. Henry who was an author from Austin, by the way (laughs) who was living there at that time and you know, he coined the phrase, but, so Honduras has always kind of been the, the, you know, kind of the image of the Banana Republic but... anyway, so a lot of the area of, so the north coast of Honduras is where the banana plantations were located. Um, and that's where the Garifunas live right so they've been there since they arrived in seventeen ninety seven, start spreading themselves out along the, you know, along the coast establishing villages, so what's interesting is the United Fruit Company and the Standard Fruit Company and those, those were actually seen by the Garifuna communities, I think, at first as as something good because they provided employment, and they weren't taking away Garifuna lands, they were, they were located off and close enough that the Garifuna could, could migrate there to work, um, as, you know, mainly the men would, would go there and work but then, but they weren't necessarily... they weren't right next to the coast where they were taking Garifuna lands with the exception of, maybe the large, like Tela, those areas. Um, so they were working for the fruit companies and, getting back to this whole idea of race, what's interesting is the fruit companies, they hired people based on race. So indigenous people were given certain kinds of jobs, mestizos were given certain kinds of jobs, and they brought in blacks from the West Indies because they spoke English and because they were Protestant, they preferred them, and they would give them the higher up, kind of more managerial positions. So again the Garifunas find themselves in this, kind of, weird position because the fruit companies, they would say, "Ok well these are, you know, they're blacks, but at the same time they're not exactly like the ones from the West Indies, they may or may not speak English, they're not Protestant, they're either Catholic or, um, you know, a mix of that and their traditional religion, um, but there was still this sense of... but then they weren't mestizos, I don't know, so... so they would often be, be given these kind of middle type jobs, they weren't doing the worst jobs but they weren't doing the best jobs either, right? But it did, it did turn out though that the Garifuna, because they are people who live along the coast, they, you know, they're very comfortable at sea, and a lot of the men, you know started working on the boats. Um, and then in the nineteen 40's when the US goes to war, a lot of the merchant marines are sent to war and so there's, they need merchant marines essentially to work these ships that are taking bananas and other things to the United States. So, the Garifuna

are often employed as, you know, working on these ships because that was something, West Indians as well right, that's also the origins of some of that. Um, so, that's how they start getting to the United States is through, you know, working for the fruit companies. And then, you know, and then they start branching off into other merchant, you know, other companies that are doing, you know, hiring people as merchant marines. So that's, that's how they end up in New Orleans, but that's how they also end up in New York. Because those were two of the places where the ships were going and it was also, where often the headquarters of the ships were. So if you wanted to go and get a contract, collect your wages, whatever, you know... you go there and then some people just started to, not get back on the ship (laughs). This is also, um, something that happens today, a lot of, a lot, well, I don't know how many but, you know, another common job is to work on cruise, cruise ships. What they call barco piratas, you know, pirate, they call them pirate ships but that's because they're US owned but they don't fly the US flag so they don't have to pay US minimum wage and benefits and so on, so... they're like be panamanian but really they're owned by a US company or something like that. So, they, you know, they they tend to dock in Miami and so, that's one entrance, another way to, you know, to enter. So it's still, it's still kind of a practice but now it's more through cruise ships. So that was really how the communities started to, you know, get established and it was mainly men at first. In the nineteen 60's, woman in general were starting to migrate to the United States from different parts of the world because the nineteen 60's is when more middle class women in the US started going into the work force. They needed nannies, they needed, you know, nurses, they needed these jobs that, um, you know, that other women in the middle class were leaving, and so, you know, this is the time when there's actually people from different parts of the world but again, one of the common places they were coming from to fulfill, to fill those job were the West Indies and in this particular case, the Garifunas were in on that wave. Um, the massive immigration from Central America in general doesn't really start until the nineteen 80's because of the wars, right? And then, in Honduras the massive immigration doesn't really start until Hurricane Mitch. So it's interesting, the Garifunas really, their pattern of immigration follows much more the West Indian pattern than the Central American pattern, initially. So they get started much earlier in the 40's... the women are working as nannies and things like that in the nineteen 60's, and uh, home attendants, right, those people who take care of people in their homes if they're ill or elderly, um, and those tend to be, or, or sort of historically more associated with West Indians. And, so they've really been in the US much longer than the, the Central Americans that we normally think of when we think of the Central American community who, they were also starting to come during those years but it tended to be more people who were coming for college or, you know, those kinds of opportunities but this massive influx doesn't really start until the nineteen 80's because of the wars. But because there wasn't a civil war in Honduras or Belize, then you don't really get that, the main countries that people are coming from in the 80's are Guatemala and El Salvador. And then it's really not until the, until Hurricane Mitch that, then you start to get many more Hondurans coming in. So the Garifunas of course are part of those waves of immigration but they also have this pattern that follows the West Indian pattern so, again, they're on that border right? They kind of follow the Central American pattern but then at the same time they also sort of follow the West Indian pattern. So for them it's been more labor migration than anything else. Whereas from

Guatemala and El Salvador it was a lot of, it was, you know, they were coming as refugees. So...

Ben: This is very fascinating. Um, as far as like culture and rituals and traditions and that sort of thing, um, um, what have you largely seen as far as like, what do they do there that they do here, as far as rituals, traditions, that sort of thing.

Sarah: Um, well that would be something, I mean I didn't really research it in the sense that I didn't, you know, do any kind of systematic investigation, I just, you know, obviously if you're living in the community these things, they happen and so you, you're there for the, you know, for the celebration right? Um, I guess the big ones would be Christmas, in Honduras, in the community that I was living with, I mean living in, okay every community and this is true for even non-Garifuna communities, they have a patron saint and so there's a week of the year which is the patron saint festival. And so that's different for every village because they all have, you know, different patron saints. Limon happens to be in December, so for them, they have the patron saint festival which is at the beginning of December and that involves... they have for example, they have dancing, but they also, they elect a queen of the festival, and you know, they do a lot of different things. Um, and they always have their, the equivalent going on, at least in New York, I won't, I don't know about LA or, or New Orleans, but in New York they always elected a queen in New York and they had a queen in Honduras and... and even people in New York would vote for the queen in Honduras, they, you know, cause it's a, you sell tickets to the, it's like a fundraising thing. Um, and then, you know, whatever was going, you know, whenever the day that they would have the dance, the big dance, you know, that kind of culminated the festival there, they would have it in New York, you know, so... Um, another big one is Christmas. So Christmas there's a lot of, again, dancing, there's certain dances that are done mainly at Christmas like the wanaragua?, the mascaro? and the, um, paranda and they go from house to house singing and, you know, so... Obviously you can't do it exactly the same way you do it in Honduras. It's easier, it's a village so, you know, uh, the people who do paranda they they spend all night going from house to house singing, obviously you're not going to do that in New York in December (laughs), you know, like you wouldn't be like walking around the Bronx, going from apartment complex so, so they, what they do is they tend to, like, rent a community center or something like that and, you know, and, so it's more like a party, right? Um so you know, so they replicate it as, to the degree that you can given the circumstances that they're in, you know, given the fact that it's not a village, it's New York City. Um, so, um, another big one is Easter. Uh, they have a celebration they call Iunani? which is, you know, it's related to Easter, it's also like a week long thing, um, I went to one of those in New York and it was, same thing, it wasn't a whole week it was more just the day in a community center. Um, what else do they have? So there's the patron saint festival, there's, there's semana santa, you know...

Ben: That's pretty Latin

Sarah: (Laughs) Yeah. Which is a really big deal. And in Honduras, everyone goes to the beach and they, they set up, uh, you know, champas, and they sell food like iguana cooked in, uh, coconut milk's a big dish you would eat at Easter. Guess it's iguana season- they're all

falling out of the trees and they're easy to catch. You see people with like, tons of them tied with ropes on the side of the road selling Iguanas. But, um, but, so again of course your not going to do that in the US but, um, you know that's a big, that's a big occasion for people to go back actually. So Christmas, Semana Santa, and summer are the big times that if you can go back, that's when you would go back with the whole family and so... In summer in Limon they also have the festival, and I don't know if this is, maybe, it may be just, um, unique to Limon, but it involves horse, like a lot things with horses and, uh what else? Those are the main ones I would say. And then of course birthdays, velorios, right? So wakes, so uh, they, they practice the, you know, year celebration if someone has died then after a year they, they have, they hold another wake with, um, dancing, and they play dominoes and cards and and again, they'll do it in New York as well. For the family members who can't go back, um, there's that. The big ones that, that are kind of famous, the dagu and the chagu, which are more related to their religion, the other ones I mentioned aren't so much religious, um, those they don't really do in New York, they kind of do them, but those are very involved and they really require a lot of, they require a lot of people, they require a lot of expertise, and they require a lot of things that it would be hard to get in New York that are related to Garifuna culture. There's a lot of parts of the ceremony that involve the ocean, so, they can't really replicate those. So the dagu is also an, an opportunity for the people to go back, you know, if they can, if they have papers and the money and so on, yeah.

Ben: Very good. Very good. Everything you're saying is fantastic. Um, I want to move on to families and ask you about Garifuna families. Uh, that sun is driving me nuts (light changes).

Sarah: Do you want me to go over there?

Ben: No, nope I want you right there. But...

Sarah: So I was there 9three, I completed the research in 90... wait, I'm trying to think...

Athena: Did you learn some Garifuna then? It's a hard language.

Sarah: I did (laughs). But, I actually studied it. I mean, um, there's, at the time, uh, there's a guy in Honduras, okay, now I'm gonna blank out on his name... what's his name? Anyway, you know if you go to a community where you have no choice but to speak that language, then you're gonna learn it super fast. I probably would have learned it really fast but the fact that everybody could speak Spanish, except for little kids, meant that, you know, I'd get lazy and, you know, it's hard to, to try to be like, forcing yourself to try to, to say something horribly wrong and gramatically... when you know all you have to do is just say it in Spanish and everyone knows what you mean and... you know, so.... So I think that was really what hindered me from (laughs) really learning it. The only people I would really talk to, sometimes in Garifuna, were the little, little, like say before they'd gone to school, once they go to school they start learning Spanish but it's like 5, 5 and under, but even then... so I can say like, "Shut the door" "Come here" "Eat your food", (laughs)

Athena: All the commands

Sarah: Yeah. I know how to speak like a 5 year old. But not even that well.

Ben: I haven't made a good decision. (audio/light adjustments). Um, I want to move on to...

Sarah: Wait where should I be looking? At the camera?

Ben: Right here. Look at me.

Sarah: Oh, okay.

Ben: Always at me. Which I know seems a little weird with the camera sitting there, but... always at me. There we go, yeah, I can live with that. Perfect. I wanna know about families, um in your book you talk a lot about these, lots of words that I haven't heard, matrifocal, things like that... this society based around mothers and, and that sort of thing. Can you put it into non-academic terms, um, as much as possible in explaining Garifuna families?

Sarah: Um

Ben: As much as you can.

Sarah: Okay. Well, first of all it's important to know that the word "matrifocal" doesn't mean "matriarchal". In other words, uh, patriarchy for example is an entire system in which men disproportionately have advantages over women, right? In the system, okay, so that's not what we're talking about, we're not, we're not saying that women have more power, it's not an issue of power first of all. Um, it's not the same as matrilineal either, a lot of people confuse that, that is where you have an entire family where everything is inherited through the mother, so it could be land, surname, title, you know, those kinds of things okay. Garifuna don't have lineages so that's not what it means either, right, so matrifocal basically refers to a sort of orientation towards mothers. Right, it doesn't mean that fathers don't play a role, that fathers are not important, but there's just sort of more, sort of symbolic importance given to mothers, and then also, within the household, there's more structural importance given to mothers. Okay, so that's another thing that's kind of important to make a distinction between families and households, those are not the same thing, right? So, a family is everyone you're related to, it's everyone who you consider to be kin, and that can sometimes include people who you're not biologically related to, so like your in-laws, or it could be a family friend who you call an aunt, or adopted step... whatever, right? So all those things. So, the families are the people that you consider to be related to. So in that sense, Garifuna families are like any other families. You know, they include lots of grandparents and cousins and aunts and uncles and you know so on and so forth. They tend to be fairly large in Honduras, they tend to be a bit smaller in the US. Women tend to have more children in Honduras than they do when they, you know... if their reproductive years are spent in the United States. Um a household are the people who live... it can be... this is also where it gets complicated because it can also mean that they live under the same roof, but it doesn't always mean that right. Because in the case of the Garifunas you might have some of the members of what we would classify as a household in the sense that they interact together, make decisions together, they act as a unit, but some of them

might be in Honduras and some might be in the United States. So what makes them a household is not living under the same roof and not necessarily even the fact that their family because obviously not your entire family lives in your household right. But it's the fact that they interact and make decisions and they tend to form some sort of economic unit. So for example if a man migrates to the United States and leaves his wife and kids behind, he's still considered a member of the household because if they're going to build a house or send the kids to school or you know money, they might send money back. Those are all things that make, you know part of the household even though he's not physically living under the same roof. It could also happen that a couple migrates and leaves the children with the grandparents. Or it could be um and older, I mean an adult woman who migrates and still supports her mother or something like that right. So this is what we mean by household right. So what I talk about in the book are different kinds of households then, not so much families, right. So households can be um anything from you know what you would consider the norm in the U.S. although it's not really the statistical norm which is the nuclear family you know, man woman kids right. Um like in the United States they have blended families. Woman with kids, man with kids. Like the Brady Bunch right all together. Um, you also have the female headed households, but that could be where the woman is the head of the household and there is no man who is living with her or contributing directly or it could be that she's living, she's running the house and she's the head of the household, but the man is still participating in that household, but he's just not physically there. You also have cases where woman are running households and the man is contributing, but he's not really considered a member of the household anymore because they're estranged, but he will still send money for the kids, kind of like paying child support, but it's more informal. Um. let's see what else. Then you have the situation of the adult couple that leaves and leaves their children with their elderly parents and then they're really contributing to the sustenance of their children, but those elderly parents might also have other children, other grandchildren with them so they're receiving money for multiple children right. It may be in the U.S. or the city of somewhere else working. Uh yah I mean there's the one type of household you really don't see at least when I was doing research in the nineties I rarely encountered with a man living by himself. The only time I encountered that was in New York and they tended to be young, you know they had kind of like a you go off to college I guess, they had migrated to the United States you know looking for work or whatever, but it wasn't really something that people seemed to want to do was to live by themselves, they preferred not to have to do that, but sometimes that did occur. But you know other than that, a lot of female households, you know when you look at them they look, it looks like there's a lot of female headed household, but it's kind of invisible unless you start asking questions is that men are participating, they're just not visibly present because they're working on a boat or they're in the city um in the case of like in the village. So a lot of the guys were working in the city um but they would come back frequently or if they are in New York, even in New York you had household where the men were working on ships. I know a lot families where again it looks like a female headed household and the man is just not there for months, so like as though he were in the military right you're deployed for a long time. So it's a nuclear family, but it's just the man's not physically present. So yeah, there's all kinds of different combinations.



Ben: Um the question that I have and when I was reading your book this kind of came to mind it's like with all of these household types and different variations of it, somehow they keep it all together. How do... any thoughts on that. How are they doing that?

Sarah: What do you mean by keep it all together.

Ben: Keeping it together as far as like grandparents having kids in the house like raising grandkids like sons or daughters. How are they managing it all? Does that make sense what I'm asking?

Sarah: you mean like economically or...

Ben: well, economically but like on a family level as far as maintaining the culture. What am I trying to ask here. Like, how do they keep they keep this culture together when I guess in my mind it should kind of scatter. It's like grandparents with kids, I mean, I met people when I was in New Orleans who were, they had... it was a couple, they had two kids here, one kid there and you know there would be a man and his wife and a kid here. You get some in Honduras... how do they how are they adjusting, how are they keeping this culture alive despite less than perfect family situations. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Sarah: Well, first of all. I think we have to maybe expand our idea of family. Um I think in the United States we really have this idea that the nuclear family is the ideal the type and even though we know there's lots of other types, we think of it as a deviation from the norm. Ok um and so even for example people who are adopted in the country will kind of you know, you know you have lots of movies about people, oh I'm adopted and you know, we're really really obsessed I think in the United States with the nuclear family and especially the biological tie. Um, but I think my impression is that for the Garifunas, they have a more expansive notion of family, so there isn't necessarily this sense that if you don't grow up with your biological parents you're doomed, you know you're going to be you know be on a on a therapist you know couch for the rest of your life you know. I just, I kind of got this sense, well first of all growing up in a village you're around so many people first of all right. So let's say your dad is on a ship... you've got five uncles living in the village or cousins or grandparents or even people who aren't um.. they might even be your second or third cousins or whatever right or inlaws, I mean you know, you're related to half the village really and that was one of the things that also I think that I thought was really interesting that I'd be walking around somebody and they see every other person and hey primo!, primo! primo! you know everyone is primo right that's cousin and it's just and then I would say so how are you related to that person and it would be this long, complicated well it's my sister da da da da duh you know people who we either wouldn't even consider family or we wouldn't even know they existed because we in this country are just so, we tend to be so spread out or you know I guess people in the United States because we move around so much with jobs. But but in that society living in a village you're just you're just around family all the time, but it's a more expansive notion of family. It's not just mom and brothers and sisters, I mean those are.. they are there as well but there's all these other people who you can consider family and who can take on those roles that family members

generally play. You know of someone you can talk to, someone who can give you money, someone who might discipline you you know, it's that classic it takes a village to raise a child, you know kind of situation. So I think that while like for us maybe the idea that you have to come to the United States let's say and leave a child behind, I mean I'm not saying that it's not difficult for them, but I think that some people would tell me well leaving my child with my grandma, oh sorry, with my mother is the same as that child being with me. Because my mother raised me and so it's like as though the child were with me. You know, so yeah it hurts you know maybe five years because it takes me a while to get my papers and this or my economic situation, but she's with my grandmother, so it's like she's being raised by me. You know and so I feel like that was kind of their their sense that family was much more expansive and it's wasn't.. it was difficult and it hurts you know to be away from people, but at the same time there's there's lots of people who can who they know will take that role of caring for their child. And so you're not just thrown into like a state foster care system or something like that. There's plenty of relatives who will pick up you know and take that role. Right, I don't even know if Honduras has a foster care system. I think relatives are the foster care system you know.

Ben: That answers it perfectly

Sarah: Yeah

Ben: You put it into words kind of what I trying to get at that was great. Um I want to know what role families play in the preservation of culture.

Sarah: well again, that's something we don't really talk about anymore in anthropology the preservation of culture, because that kind of assumes that culture is something that you can preserve that it's just like if it's a fixed form then you can just like put it in the freezer and you know, it just stays or something. But that's not really the way we think about culture anymore, I mean cultures are constantly changing and so on. So I think really what, you know if you looked at what garifuna culture was three hundred years ago or two hundred years ago it's not going to be the same that it is today. Lots of things have changed, some things have been lost, some things have been gained, some things have been modified, right according to circumstances, so really more what what I think what is being preserved is identity as Garifuna right. As just this sense that I am Garifuna, whether I speak the language, whether I know how to dance mascaro isn't so crucial as do I identify with my community, that's one. And then the other thing would be more of preservation of a sense of community. That people aren't just because as you said, they're so dispersed and yet they still maintain this cohesiveness of constantly wanting to interact in different ways, whether it's going back home or having a, you know, settlement day, that's one of their rituals that actually or celebrations that that's practiced in LA, especially in the for the Belizean community and and that kind of people might come from other parts of the country just to go to that celebration and so there's all these ways that, you know. So I think that the, the part that the family plays in that is you know, the family is the core that maintains all of that all that communication and that exchange of people you know when when Garifuna migrate to the United States, they always go to somebody that is a member of their, usually it's a member of their family. Again, it might be second cousin or an uncle,

or it's just a they almost always know somebody and so the minute they get here they are integrated into households that's somehow related to them you know and be a part of that family and I think families. My impression, again in New York and this was also true in New Orleans, I was really struck by how much they speak Garifuna for example. I kind of almost felt like they spoke Garifuna more in the U.S. than they would in Honduras, you know. It just seemed really more they they really felt comfortable speaking in Garifuna even though they almost all of them can, they all speak Spanish and a lot of them can also speak English uh and they you know, they need to learn English you know in the United States to some degree but they just felt really comfortable speaking in Garifuna, so you see that a lot that even kids being raised, being raised in the US are tri-lingual which I think is really you know really amazing. Food, like I was saying you know really really really love Garifuna food. I do, they do, they're very proud of it so you know, a lot of Garifuna cooking going on in the house. It was very rare that I would see people cook something else, like what we would consider American food like I don't know macaroni and cheese or something . Um, music is another thing they love Garifuna music and it just seemed like any house I went into to there was always playing and again, what's really great for them, I mean the advantage that they have is that they can draw on Garifuna music that's being sung in English, Garifuna, and Spanish. From Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Belize and the United States right and so even though it's one I guess style of music you could say, still there's all that variety you know so yeah. I would say I mean I felt like families were very they had they had a lot of incentive to really um inculcate in their children this pride in being Garifuna and following Garifuna traditions because I think that for some immigrant groups there's been a lot discrimination towards them because of their identity and so parents would sometimes say well then don't speak Spanish or don't speak whatever language and you know, don't let people know what you are because they'll be you know they'll discriminate against you. But because the Gari, because people don't know what a Garifuna is they don't have prejudices. They might be prejudice toward them for being black or being latino, but they don't have a prejudice for Garifuna because they don't really know what that is . And so I think it's easier for kids to be say no but I'm a Garifuna and let me explain to you what that is and people are fascinated and that's source of pride rather than a source of shame which has happened for other immigrants.

Ben: Interesting

Sarah: Yeah, that's my impressions.

Ben: Um (mumbling and probably a question about her research in New Orleans)

Sarah: Well, it was published in two thousand ten, but I went in two thousand eight yeah. It takes a while for things to get published. there's usually a big lag time when you actually do the research and

Ben: I'm so cheap I didn't even find the article-- it's only on one spot that I could find it and it was like fifteen dollars. I just read the abstract.

Sarah: Oh really?

Ben: You can tell what kind of budget we're on here

Sarah: Well I can give you a copy

Ben: I would love a copy of it.

Sarah: I think I have yeah yeah and I can just photocopy it.

Ben: Don't let me leave without it because I was like fifteen dollarsh unh.

Athena: You're the biggest cheapskate.

Ben: I am!

Athena: I would have told you you could have bought it.

Ben: I was like, you know I read the abstract and I knew I was just going to ask you questions about it anyway. Kind of give me an overview of like what you were studying down there and like I love the title. Give me an overview of what it was.

Sarah: Well, um ok so you remember that Katrina happened in two thousand five um and one of the things that I was really interested in I don't know if you remember the mayor Ray Nagin uh I think it was maybe a year after Katrina I can't remember exactly the dates but one of the things that was happening was you know once things had kind of settled down and people were turning to the city um. They were noticing that more whites than blacks were returning to the city and so all of sudden there's all of these articles in the newspaper and people were on the news talking about oh what's going to happen to New Orleans because you know before Katrina was a majority black city which is really striking considering that you know I don't know what African Americans are now sitting at I don't know thirteen percent of the overall U.S. population, but in New Orleans it was something like seventy percent... that's huge right and then to and then of course their cultural influence and the music and the food it's just so much a part of New Orleans you know so. When they were noticing these demographics right um then Ray Nagin made his famous comment about the fact that New Orleans was going to remain a chocolate city and so uh it was also at the same time this was when you started to get all these reports about Central Americans that oh no there's all, suddenly is it not only whites that are returning but all of a sudden there's all these Central Americans showing up where are these people coming from right and of course you know a lot of them were coming to work in the cleanup um. But it was interesting that this was for for the people in the news and theres' like I quote some like NPR reports and different things like that where they're acting like no Latino had ever ever set foot in New Orleans before Katrina right. I thought well, wait a minute I know the Garifuna have been there for a long time, you know I'd always been told that Honduran population in the U.S. was one of the largest live in New Orelans. (I don't know what she said here). So it can't really be true. And why are they panicking anyway right what's big deal you know right. So there's all these articles coming out about you know is the is the

racial composition of New Orleans going to change and so on. So I thought well this is really interesting this is a great example of how race in the United States has just been directly constructed around basically black and white and especially in the South. Not so much true in the southwest because you know there's a large Latino population and New York's just a big mix of whatever but but in the South you know it's always been black and white. And so all of sudden people are panicking about the presence of this other group and where are they going to fit you know. Are they gonna compete with African Americans for jobs you know are the whites going to want them there are they going to change the culture. You know this was the tone that was in the newspaper articles and the new reports and I thought well but what about the Garifunas. Again, here they are you know do they fit into his definition of the chocolate city because you know they're black so the color is there but they're also latino and they come from Central America and they were doing a lot of the same jobs that you know the Central Americans that the new reports were sort of panicking about were doing. So I was thinking, I was wondering how how New Orleans was kind of reacting to the the presence of Garifunas if they even noticed them. Uh, which I discovered they didn't even really notice them but then how were the Garifuna kind of navigating this this this new set of panic that was going on about the racial composition and what does it mean to be from New Orleans and do Latinos have a place and so on. so anyway, that's why I started doing you know, looking into the history of the presence of New Orleans, I mean Hondurans in New Orleans and there's not a lot written on it. it's really kind of hard to find resources on that and then I was also looking at, again when you read the reports of how the different communities were impacted in New Orleans. Again, I almost all the reports just talk about blacks and whites and latinos and Asians, there's actually a fairly substantial Vietnamese community as you know. Um, sometimes work themselves in to the statistics but they're rarely talked about or mentioned. You know there's a really good documentary on the Vietnamese community by the way and how it was affected by Katrina.

Ben: Cool

Sarah: But um yeah so I thought well it would be interesting to see ok so everyone's saying that the Katrina really revealed the racial stratification of New Orleans, but they all talked about it just in terms of black and white really those were the only two categories possible. Well where are the Garifuna then? Where do they fit into that so yeah so that's really what motivated me to kind of look at you know well where were they when Katrina hit uh what are the demographics of those areas turns out the Garifuna, a lot of them are living in uh I don't know how they say it in New Orleans village de la este

Ben: Is that New Orleans East?

Sarah: It's new Orleans east yeah. Um a lot of the the maps break it down by by what do they come them in New Orleans. It's like they're different parishes and and yeah yeah but even within parishes there's the different neighborhoods, community districts I don't know, but anyway they have different names well so yeah, the Garifuna were in New Orleans east largely but even within that there's different areas that have heavier than other areas. And they happen to be right on the border of two areas um where it was

predominantly people you know not extreme poverty but you know in poverty um but not African American but mainly vietnamese, but right on the other side of the highway literally was a much more African American area. So a lot of the same you know things that you see for example they were the most heavily flooded they had the least investment in those areas uhm you know the people in those areas had the least ability to return because they maybe didn't have insurance or they didn't have the money to rebuild their houses so a lot of that, a lot of the same stuff affected the Garifuna too. But the difference I found was that um they tended not to own homes, so even though yes they a lot of them everything like their furniture and everything was destroyed, they didn't I only knew one family that owned a home. Everyone could just come back to live in an apartment uhm. The other thing was they tended they want to live in new Orleans at least again when I was doing the research, they tended to be without family. In other words, it wasn't that they weren't married and didn't have kids, but they just weren't with them. Like they had migrated mainly to work. And so it wasn't that hard for them to go back once everything was when people started moving back to to do work. Because you know the ones who had kids they waited a very long time to go back because you know you needed a school and you needed sanitation you know the basic infrastructural things. Um so a lot of them were part of that wave of people who came and you know were working in the cleanup. You know pulling dead bodies out of houses and you know doing all that really dangerous and and unsanitary you know work that you know not anybody wanted to do. So they played a really important role in you know getting New Orleans back on it's feet. But they tended to be working with other people from Central America.

Ben: (a question you can't hear)

Sarah: Well, it's the same thing you know and again because because in New Orleans historically people think you're either black or white or some kind of creole right. There are I mean historically New Orleans had a lot of interracial mixing and so there's all the old categories octurn cuatrern, you know. Um so you know there's that it still was on this here's whites here's blacks and then there's like these things in between right um the honduran community was my impression was even with or without the Garifunas the Honduran community in itself which is mainly over in Kenner near the airport was also fairly invisible. And there wasn't much written about it when people started like when reporters were going to the shelters they were like what are these Hondurans doing here like they didn't know they were living in Honduras and they'd been there since the banana days I mean we're talking early nineteen hundreds. Um the Garifuna interestingly and this is something they tend to seem to do everywhere they go they don't live with the mestizo honduras so they weren't in Kenner, I mean there might have been some, but the majority were living in New Orleans East which is like the other side, a more African American area. You see the same thing in New York, you see the same thing in LA right and in Houston um so here they are kind of living in in a Vietnamese area but where a lot of African Americans are renting homes from Vietnamese families um so the assumption I think for most New Orleanians is well they're they're black right. Um so they kind of would blend in in those neighborhoods right but they were speaking Garifuna if someone hears Garifuna I don't know if you have anyone in your film speaking Garifuna it can be very easily mistaken for an African language so people would say, so then if they didn't want to be identified as

Latino by speaking Spanish, they'd speak Garifuna then people think they're African immigrants, so they could be mistaken for African Americans if you just see them. If you hear them speak Garifuna they could be mistaken for Africans, but then when they're speaking Spanish you know then then people are not sure well who are these people then because they don't look Latino, Central American because there's a stereotype of what a Central American looks like which is more Mestizo so again, they can kind of you know blend in different situations and so on so they were sort of taking advantage of the economic niche which was open to Central Americans by the fact that you know people from new Orleans had left and really didn't want to go back until you know conditions were better. But at the same time they didn't stick out like Central Americans they could blend in as African Americans um there's a lot of Central Americans being being robbed and so on during that time because the assumption was they were being paid in cash. The walking ATM machines so. A lot of the Garifuna I talked to said they avoided that problem. You know so again, it's you know it's invisibility which of course can be very disadvantageous because what that also meant was that people like FEMA weren't searching them out to say hey we need to help you because they didn't really recognize them as a population that had been you know hit by the storm. So racial invisibility can be a disadvantage in the sense that the government isn't really seeking you out in order to help you, but at the same time it can be an advantage for exactly the same reason because the government's not seeking you out to persecute you either right and you can kind of move between these different contexts you know looking for advantageous niches you know in different places. So that's the kind of what I concluded was you know and some people would literally say that they would say, if the cops stop you, you speak Spanish. Because they are very prejudice towards African Americans. But if someone's gonna mug you you speak Garifuna, because then they'll think you're African and not a Latino. You know. They had different strategies that they would use and they'd figured this out that there's. and you know that's the reality there's all these racial and class prejudices and they're really just trying to work within this you know complex system that has been created in the United States. And everyone has to figure out you know how to how to manage this.

-End of audio!!\_