

## Garifuna Film Trilogy Completes Principal Photography of Part 1

Written by Leslie Bengochea

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Film producers Ali Allie and Ruben Reyes have completed principal photography on Part 1 of the Garifuna Film Trilogy (<http://www.garifunafilmtrilogy.com>), shot in Los Angeles, California and Triunfo de la Cruz, Honduras. The Garifuna Film Trilogy is a series of interlocking dramatic feature films which promote the retention of Garifuna culture, heritage, language and pride worldwide, and send a call to action for greater protection of indigenous cultures.

The story of the first film centers around Ricardo (Ruben Reyes), a Garifuna language instructor in the United States who sets out to help his village on the North Coast of Honduras by attempting to build a small school there to teach children their native tongue. However, he runs into unforeseen opposition when his brother Miguel (Julian Castillo) becomes embroiled in a shady land deal that jeopardizes the building of the school. This prompts Ricardo to return to Honduras and confront land rights issues along with his educational mission.

The Garifuna are descendants of Carib, Arawak and West African people who live in the coastal regions of Honduras, Belize, Guatemala and Nicaragua in Central America. The Garifuna came to be in Central America after they were exiled from their homeland (the island of St. Vincent in the Caribbean) by the British in 1797 after nearly two centuries of successfully defending their freedom against colonization. Since they refused to submit to slavery, the Garifuna managed to preserve both their African roots and their Amerindian heritage, a fusion resulting in a unique ethnicity considered indigenous to the Americas. In 2001, UNESCO ( [http://www.unesco.org/bp/i/intangible\\_heritage/](http://www.unesco.org/bp/i/intangible_heritage/) ) proclaimed the language, dance and music of the Garifuna as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

A major subplot of the first film involves a dramatization of historical events on the island of St. Vincent before the Garifuna's exile. A group of teenagers in Los Angeles rehearse and perform a theatrical play "Garinagu in Peril" (written by Bill Flores) as a play-within-a-play theater and dance spectacle (choreographed by Georgette Lambey) that is interwoven throughout the film, highlighting the leadership of Garifuna Paramount Chief Joseph Satuye (E.J. Mejia).

The film itself embodies a unique cultural synergy: dialogue in three languages (Garifuna, English and Spanish), a mixture of dramatic and documentary textures, an educational theme

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with sociopolitical undertones, and an unprecedented cast of Garifuna talent, some of whom have been fixtures of cultural advocacy in Los Angeles for over 20 years.

Ali Allie ( <http://www.aliallie.com> ) (producer) is an independent filmmaker and cinematographer living in Los Angeles, California. Allie's initial foray into the world of Garifuna culture began when he worked as a volunteer in an orphanage in Honduras run by a Garifuna man. A few years later, Allie returned to La Ceiba, Honduras to direct the first feature film relating to Garifuna culture and spirituality, "El Espíritu de mi Mamá ( <http://www.losgatosproductions.com/spirit> )" (Spirit of my Mother) which told the fictional story of a Garifuna woman's spiritual journey of re-identification with her own culture.

Ruben Reyes ( <http://www.rubenreyesonline.com> ) (producer), a Garifuna scholar and educator, has a vast knowledge of Garifuna culture and history and is a Garifuna language expert. In addition to teaching Garifuna language classes in Los Angeles in association with the Garifuna American Heritage Foundation ( <http://www.garifunaheritagefoundation.com> ), Reyes hosts "The Sasamu Show" (a weekly interview program about Garifuna culture and community issues) on GariTV.com ( <http://www.gariv.com> ). Reyes is also the inventor of the Garifuna clock, editor of the New Garifuna Trilingual Dictionary and the designer of an enhanced Garifuna flag. He has also translated the national anthems of Honduras, Guatemala and the USA into Garifuna.

The Garifuna Film Trilogy project is independently produced and has been ten years in development by Allie and Reyes who originally met at the Los Angeles Pan African Film Festival at a screening of Allie's "El Espíritu de mi Mamá".