The Cha-Chas of St. Thomas: A Prezi-presentation with written manuscript
by Göde Both, Elsa Brander and Randi Marselis (Group 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Our presentation is called <strong>The Cha-Chas of St-Thomas</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amongst the Cha-Cha’s</td>
<td>Looking through the digitized photographs we came upon this postcard that made us curious. Who were these people staring so intensely back on the photographer? Who turned an anthropological lens towards them in order to profit from the picturesque diversity on the Virgin Islands?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.kb.dk/images/billed/2010/okt/billede/object300415/da/">http://www.kb.dk/images/billed/2010/okt/billede/object300415/da/</a></td>
<td>Digitizing our curiosity we searched through the internet in order to find information – and our presentation is anachronistically mixing information from online news articles, discussions, academic sources and materials from the digitized collections of The Royal Library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPK000869.tif</td>
<td>According to the Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage the ChaCha’s are …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://books.google.dk/books?id=PmvSk13sIlcOC&pg=PA145&dq=cha+cha+st+thomas&hl=da&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=cha%20cha%20st%20thomas&f=false

According to the Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage the ChaCha’s are …
“White Virgin Islanders of French descent” …

But we soon learned, that they are also known as **Frenchies** …


On **VIMovingCenter**, a platform for information concerning the US virgin islands, we came across a forum discussion started off by this question:

“who and what are the "frenchies" on STT, i heard yesterday that they are white locals and can be quite obstinate, i’m assuming they were here before the Danes and the plantation system, i don’t think we have any on STX”

So is it their obstinate nature that makes the people
The Frenchies or Chachas are descendants of migrants who sometime in the period between the 1850's and 1880's came to St. Thomas (the red pin) from the island Saint-Barthélemy also called Saint Bart's (the yellow pin). They were possibly descendants of Huguenots, thus protestants, from Brittany and Normandy in Northern France. Due to their religious conviction many Huguenots were deported to the French West Indies in the 1600s. However other of our sources tells us that the ChaChas in St. Thomas are Catholics, which complicates the matter of their origin.

Saint-Barthélemy was occupied by the French in 1648; it was sold to Sweden in 1784 but was returned to France in 1877 after a public vote. Thus the island was under Swedish rule at the time, when the ChaChas migrated to St. Thomas. Their situation on the barren St. Bart's was difficult, and they went to St. Thomas in hope of better opportunities.

However, close relations between the islanders were maintained throughout the generations as told by Sebastian Greaux in 1987: "Everybody on St. Barts has relatives here on St. Thomas and vice versa. We are very close. People go back and forth between the two islands all the time."

(in Hillinger 1987)

On St.Thomas they settled as farmers and fishers around Hull Bay on the Northern side of the island as well as close to Charlotte Amalie in the fishermen's village Caranage – also called Cha Chatown – and later renamed Frenchtown. In the digitized collection we found topographical images and postcards showing the area around the Cha Cha village ...

(Showing 3 images, DT130656.tif + DT130655.tif +

on 2007. And were the Frenchies actually at St. Thomas before the Danes?

Reference: Oxford Dictionary of English

References:


We also noticed a fascination with the people living there. The Frenchies or ChaChas have historically been mocked by other Virgin Islanders. They were teased about their language or patois, a mixture of French, Creole and English. And also about their clothes – straw hats, bare feet and the old fashioned black dresses and traditional Brittany bonnets of the women.

The label Cha-Cha seems to be a nickname ascribed to the group by other Virgin Islanders. Some of our sources suggest that “Cha-Cha” was an expression, used by the French-speaking settlers to shoo away those, who were teasing them.

In quotes from Encyclopedia Brittanica from the 1980’s the ChaChas were furthermore, described as “a clannish, aloof and industrious community” (see Williamson-Bryan n.d.) And in the before mentioned discussion thread from 2007 they were described as people you should not be messing with. Thus the prevailing stereotypes seem to be that they keep to themselves, are unfriendly and ill-tempered.

References:

### Stereotypes

*Stereotypes* get hold of a few ‘simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized’ characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity.

- Stuart Hall, 1997

**Reference:**


---

Returning to the *Amongst the Cha-Cha’s* postcard that initially caught our attention, we notice once again the many gazes returned towards us. In the terms of social semiotics this photographs may be described as a demand image. The many gazes towards the camera creates symbolic contact between the depicted individuals and the onlookers (Machin and Mayr 2012: 71) So are they actually challenging us?

**ZOOM** – Are they protesting against our anthropological gaze? Or are they simply obstinate and ill-tempered people? **ZOOM OUT**

We worry that by using this image we are perpetuating the stereotypes of the ChaChas. And after having read up on the ChaChas our reading may actually have become more prejudiced, as we read their faces with all the digitized anecdotes in mind.

**Reference:**