

# The Cultural Mosaic of the Indigenous Caribbean

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**Summary.** On Columbus's first voyage he developed an interpretation of the political geography of the Caribbean that included two major indigenous groups—Tainos (or Arawaks) of the Greater Antilles and the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles. Subsequent Spanish encounters with indigenous peoples in the region did not challenge this interpretation directly, and Crown policy allowing the capture of indigenous slaves from Caribbean islands supposed to have been "Carib" tended to reinforce Columbus's vision of an archipelago divided between only two groups. Recent ethnohistorical and archaeological research has provided evidence that challenges this interpretation. In the reinterpretation presented here, it is argued that before European contact, as has been the case since European conquest, the Caribbean archipelago was probably more ethnically and linguistically diverse than is usually assumed.

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS after Columbus landed in the New World, the nature and diversity of the indigenous peoples of the Americas are still not completely understood. Those five hundred years have been marked by continual reappraisals of the variability and complexity of indigenous American societies, with each generation discovering that earlier European and Euroamerican views were too poorly informed or limited to make sense of the expanding body of information relating to New World people. Fifteenth century explorers' expectations of the people of the Caribbean were drawn from sketchy accounts of Asia and Africa. Sixteenth century conquistadors approached the American mainlands with expectations that

the people there would be like those in the Caribbean. Seventeenth century colonists in North America anticipated great indigenous nations like those in Mesoamerica and the Andes. Only in the last century have we begun to recognize and understand not only the diversity and complexity of the indigenous groups of the Americas, but also something of their history.

This essay addresses a situation in which previous interpretations of the nature and history of the indigenous people now seem unable to account adequately for the existing evidence. Historians and anthropologists in the Caribbean have, in the absence of more persuasive evidence to the contrary, generally accepted as reasonably accurate the earliest Spanish interpretations of the cultural geography of the area. Only recently have they begun to unravel the greater cultural and geographic diversity of the prehistoric and contact-period societies of the Caribbean.

The earliest European view of the Caribbean, developed during the first two voyages of Columbus, was that there were two groups of people living there. On his first voyage Columbus's ships reached the central Bahamas, sailed southwest to Cuba, then east to Hispaniola (Figure 1). In all of these places he and his men communicated to some extent with the people who lived there and gathered some rather vague information about people who lived on the islands to the east. They returned to Spain from the Samaná peninsula on the northeastern tip of Hispaniola. On the second voyage a larger fleet made landfall on Dominica and sailed through the Lesser Antilles, then went west via Puerto Rico to Hispaniola. Combining their brief observations of the people of the Lesser Antilles made on this voyage with the information they had received from the people of Hispaniola on the first voyage, Columbus and others concluded that the Caribbean was inhabited by two distinct groups—the people of the Bahamas and Greater Antilles, and the people of the Lesser Antilles. The latter, through a complex corruption of a name or names the Europeans had heard on the first voyage, were called Caribs. The former came to be called Arawaks or Tainos.

The idea that the Caribbean was occupied by just two groups, or at the most three (including the Guanahatabey, who will be discussed below), has proved difficult to accept. Linguistic evidence has undermined this position, and in several key areas the archaeological evidence does not correspond well with the Spaniards' interpretations. As will be argued below, the situation was more complex. The view taken here is that in 1492 the Caribbean islanders were far more diverse, in language, culture, and history, than they were considered to have been before (see also Davis *in press*). It is argued that in the Greater Antilles there were several ethnic groups who spoke mutually unintelligible languages, and in the Lesser

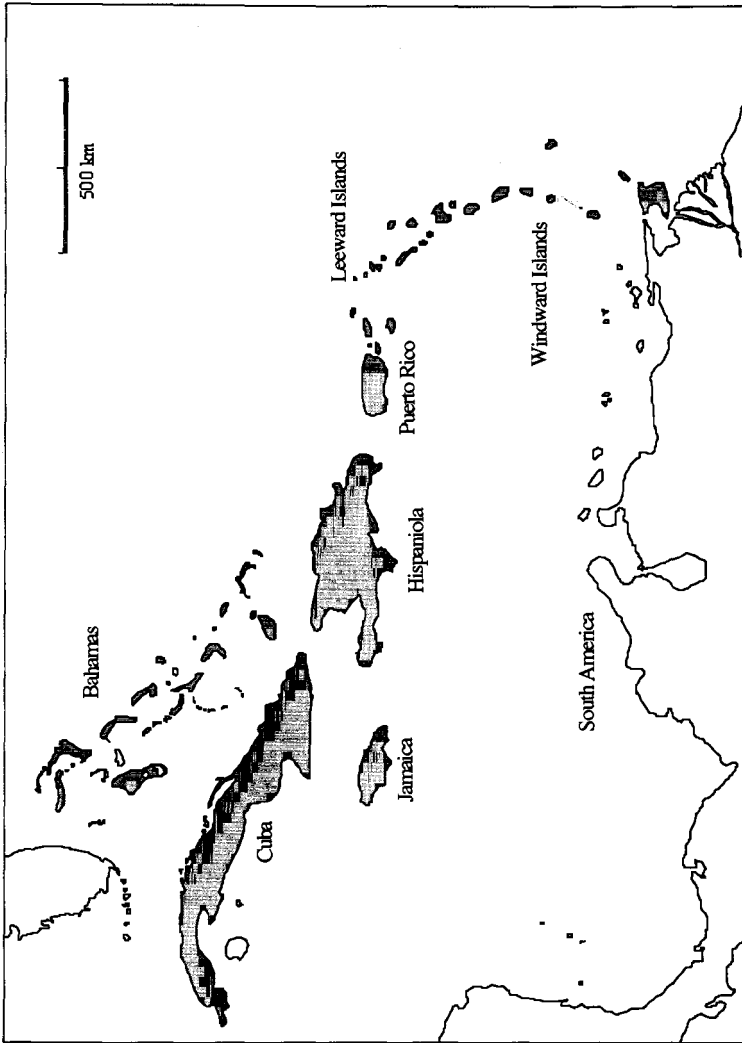


Figure 1 The Islands of the Caribbean.

Antilles there were several different groups with different languages and histories of Caribbean colonization. Instead of the bi-cultural Caribbean that Columbus perceived, the Caribbean in 1492—both the Lesser and Greater Antilles—comprised a mosaic of different linguistic and cultural groups, whose histories of colonization and subsequent divergence were distinct.

In the interest of clarity, I should explain my use of the terms “culture” and “people”. These terms are used in a contemporary anthropological sense, not as they have traditionally been used by archaeologists to refer to a recurring assemblage of artifacts (Childe 1936: Rouse 1992:26–27), and the group who made those artifacts. Both “culture” and “people” are, in the present essay, closely related to the concept of ethnic groups, defined by Dragadze (1980:162) as “a firm aggregate of people, historically established on a given territory, possessing in common relatively stable peculiarities of language and culture, and also recognizing their unity and difference from other similar formations . . .”

## Modern Analogies

That the modern Caribbean is culturally and linguistically diverse hardly needs to be argued. In the island chain from Trinidad at the southern end to Cuba and the Bahamas in the north and west, more than a dozen languages are spoken. On most of the Lesser Antillean islands one of the major colonial languages (Spanish, English, Dutch, French) is dominant, with Creole languages also being spoken by a large part of the population. On many of the Lesser Antilles (e.g. St. Lucia, St. Martin, St. Eustatius, St. Barthélemy, St. Croix) two or more European languages are spoken, in addition to Creole languages. Most of the Greater Antillean islands are also multi-lingual. Puerto Rico, for instance, is officially bi-lingual. Hispaniola, divided between the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic and French-speaking Haiti, is obviously so, but on that island there are also populations speaking English, Hungarian, German, Yiddish, Japanese, and several mutually-unintelligible Creole languages. Cuba has a notable English-speaking enclave at Guantanamo Bay, and Jamaica contains areas of French and Spanish speakers.

Clearly this linguistic diversity resulted from an involved history of colonization and conquest from outside the Caribbean. Several European groups were competing with one another for colonies and resources in the islands, and together they replaced, violently, the indigenous populations that had existed there for some time. That this occurred during historic times, however, does not mean that the situation that developed over the

last five hundred years bears no analytically useful relationship to what went on in the prehistoric Caribbean. Colonization and conquest from outside occurred in prehistory as well.

Although the possible analogies that might be drawn between the historic and prehistoric colonizations of the Caribbean will be discussed in more detail below, the nature of the possible similarities should be mentioned here. They involve both the circumstances of conquest and the setting. Perhaps the most important factor linking the prehistoric and historic colonizing movements of people is that, apart from the first small movement of non-horticultural people into the Caribbean, the islands being colonized had occupants. Also, from the earliest conquest of the Caribbean to the most recent, the resistance of the people living there to the invaders grew stronger each time. Another possible analogue is that in historic times, and arguably with the first movement of ceramics-producing, horticultural people into the Caribbean, the invasions comprised multiple ethnic groups who were competing for the same contested territory. Finally, especially in the Lesser Antilles, the configuration of small, somewhat defensible islands may have lent itself to the establishment of a patchwork of ethnic strongholds. Certainly, in the historic period, the Lesser Antilles were carved up into a rather jumbled array of Island Carib, Danish, Spanish, Dutch, English, and French islands.

These possible analogies between the historic and prehistoric periods are raised cautiously, because clearly major differences separate the two situations. Nevertheless, for the historic period at least, nowhere in the Americas has such a multi-ethnic mosaic of colonies survived as persistently as those in the Caribbean.

## The Earliest European Interpretations of the Cultural Geography of the Caribbean

Columbus reached land in the Bahamas on 12 October 1492. Over the next three months he travelled through the Bahamas, along the eastern end of the north coast of Cuba, and across the north coast of Hispaniola. His initial observations were coloured by his belief that he was on the fringe of the large eastern civilization described by Marco Polo. His comments concerning the configuration of the islands were based on an assumption that Cipango and Quinsay were to the northwest, west, or southwest of Cuba.

Describing the Lucayan people he met on the first day after landfall, Columbus said: "They should be good and obedient servants, for I see that

they say very quickly everything that is said to them; and I believe that they would become Christians very easily, as it seemed to me that they had no religion" (Dunn and Kelley 1989:67–69). Elsewhere the Lucayans, and later people from Cuba and Hispaniola, are described as attractive, peaceful, intelligent, and cooperative. They were also portrayed as unthreatening: in Columbus's log of the first day after landfall he notes that, "[t]hey do not carry arms nor are they acquainted with them, because I showed them swords and they took them by the edge and through ignorance cut themselves" (Dunn and Kelley 1989:67).

Throughout Columbus's journal from the first voyage the beginning of the binary (Taino–Carib) classification of Caribbean peoples emerges. The image of Caribs is first monstrous: on 4 November there are hints of strange people, "one-eyed men, and others, with snouts of dogs, who ate men, and that as soon as one was taken they cut his throat and drank his blood and cut off his genitals" (Dunn and Kelley 1989:133). On 23 November they became more concrete, but, according to the interpreted signs of Columbus's captured guides, they were located on the island of Bohío or Hispaniola—"which they said was very large and there were people on it who had one eye in their foreheads, and others whom they called cannibals, of whom they showed great fear" (Dunn and Kelley 1989:167). After a few weeks, having come to know the people of Hispaniola better, the Caribs were perceived to reside farther to the east. On 11 December Columbus recorded that, "the people of all these islands [Bahamas, Cuba, and Hispaniola] live in great fear of those from Caniba. And thus I say again how other times I said . . . that Caniba is nothing else but the people of the Grand Khan, who must be here very close to this place. And they have ships and come to capture the islanders, and since they do not return the other islanders think they have been eaten" (Dunn and Kelley 1989:217).

On 17 December 1492 Columbus got the news that the Caribs were perceived to be an adjacent and immediate threat:

the Indians sported with the Christians and brought them certain arrows, the kind from Caniba, or from the cannibals; and they are [made] from spikes of cane, and they insert into them some sharp little sticks, fire-toasted, and they are very long. Two men showed the Spaniards that some pieces of flesh were missing from their bodies, and they gave the Spaniards to understand that the cannibals had eaten them by mouthfuls. (Dunn and Kelley 1989:237).

On 26 December, at a meeting with an indigenous chief (notably after Columbus's aura of potency has been greatly reduced by the sinking of the *Santa María* two days before), there "was some talk about the men of Caniba, whom they call Caribs, who come to capture them and who carry

bows and arrows"; Columbus advised the local cacique or ruler, "by signs that the sovereigns of Castile would order the Caribs destroyed" (Dunn and Kelley 1989:285-7).

The idea of dangerous Caribs, living somewhere to the east and preying on the people he had come to know on Hispaniola, was by this time instilled in Columbus. His last encounter with native people on the first voyage cemented this view of the two-part division of the people of the islands. On the Samaná peninsula on the northeastern tip of Hispaniola, there was a brief skirmish between his men and some indigenous people. Both parties quickly fled and no one was killed, but Columbus's comments reflect his assessment of the cultural geography of the areas of which he had some information:

He was pleased [by the skirmish] because now the Indians would fear the Christians, since without doubt the people there, he says, are evildoers and he believed they were people from Carib and they would eat men. He was also glad because . . . the Indians would be afraid of doing [the 39 men left at Navidad] any harm. And if they are not Caribs, at least they must be from the frontiers and of the same customs and be men without fear, not like the others of the islands, who are cowards and, beyond understanding, without arms (Dunn and Kelley 1989:335)

As he left for Spain at the end of the first voyage, Columbus had firmly in mind the distinction between those whom he perceived to be peaceful and harmless on the one hand, and on the other dangerous, belligerent Caribs. His later experiences, and those of European conquerors to follow, were interpreted in ways that tended to confirm this perception.

Over the next decade, Hispaniola became the focus of Spanish operations in the New World. In 1493, La Isabela was founded as the principal port and capital (Deagan, this volume). In 1496 those functions were taken over by the southern port of Santo Domingo. In these early years of the conquest of Hispaniola, and the exploration of the other Caribbean islands, the Europeans learned a considerable amount concerning the indigenous societies of the Caribbean.

## Taino Societies in the Greater Antilles

In the Greater Antilles, Taino society has a rather complex system of political organization. On Hispaniola, for instance, there were five major political entities (and probably some minor ones), each of which comprised approximately twenty to seventy villages. Some villages are described as having populations numbering as high as 3,000 people. A *cacique* or chief held substantial power over his polity, although the precise limits of the

office's power are unclear. The cacique was centrally involved in political and religious ceremonies, having a role as intermediary between humans and the deities (Rouse 1992; Stevens Arroyo 1988; Wilson 1990a).

Taino ceremonialism was centred on acts of communication between caciques (and sometimes shamans) and supernatural deities. The process involved ritual purification, with the participants staying within the marked confines of ceremonial areas, bathing at sacred spots along watercourses, and purging, using finely carved sticks to force regurgitation. A cacique would also inhale a powdered narcotic plant called *cohoba*, enter a trance, and communicate with Taino deities or with a spirit-helper with whom he had a special relationship.

There was also an economic aspect (arguably a minor one) to the caciques' role as intermediary between natural and supernatural realms. The rituals surrounding at least some of these trance events involved people from the whole cacicazgo. Gifts of food were given to the cacique, who then distributed them to the people. This is certainly reminiscent of Service's (1971) concept of "redistribution", which he considered to be a defining feature of chiefdom societies. Under ordinary circumstances, however, the cacique does not seem to have played an important part in the redistribution of food or goods within his province. Rather, the characteristics of Taino society which conform most closely to recent neoevolutionary descriptions are their multi-village political alliances, and their system of social hierarchy, which appears to have bordered on social stratification with class endogamy.

Another Taino practice that was related to both social and political hierarchy was the ball game. The Greater Antillean ball game was similar to the game played in Mesoamerica and South America (Alegría 1983; Stern 1949). It was played on large courts, sometimes lined with standing slabs of stone. The game was of great importance in Taino life, being closely linked to other kinds of ceremonialism (Stevens Arroyo 1988:242-3). It was also the focus of a wide variety of interactions between the Taino chiefdoms: it was the venue for exchange, for the arrangement of elite intermarriage, and for the resolution of disputes (Alegría 1983; Wilson 1990b).

It is interesting to note that Taino ball courts often were located at the interstices of chiefdoms. One of the largest ball court centres on the island of Hispaniola was in the highland valley of Constanza. Constanza was midway between the region known as Maguana, the province of the cacique Caonabo, and Maguá, the region ruled by the cacique Guarionex. There are also several ball courts on the small island of Mona, which lies between western Puerto Rico and eastern Hispaniola (Alegría 1983). At Constanza, Mona, and other interstitial centres, the events surrounding



the ball game probably provided an important venue for the interaction of the various Taino chiefdoms.

Taino society had some degree of social stratification, with two and perhaps three tiers in the status hierarchy. Here, reconstructions are somewhat tenuous, especially for any but the highest social stratum. The Spanish observers recorded too little about the social system to allow for confident interpretation. Indeed, many chroniclers apparently had great difficulty understanding the Taino social system even in general terms. It now seems clear, for instance, that status was reckoned matrilineally, and residence was probably avunculocal (Keegan and Maclachlan 1989). The probable patterns of inheritance of chiefly status and power—in which a man would inherit offices and wealth from his mother's brother, yet be subordinate in social status to his mother and sisters—did not make sense to most of the observers. Nor did they have very much time in which to grasp the complexity of the system, since between 1492 and 1500 Taino social and political institutions were literally disintegrating as the majority of the population died from epidemics and famine. The hierarchical institutions of Taino society on Hispaniola had been destroyed by 1500, and the society itself had virtually ceased to exist by the mid-sixteenth century (Anderson-Córdova 1990; Rouse 1992; Wilson 1990a, 1993).

From ethnohistoric and archaeological information, it is likely that the Taino economy was very much like that of lowland South America, based on cultivated cassava or manioc (*Manihot utilissima*). There is evidence of the intensification of horticultural production through the use of heavily fertilized mounds of earth called *conucos*, and possibly some irrigation. Maize was observed in the Greater Antilles, but was not noted to be a major crop. Seafood provided protein even in the interior, since it could be preserved and transported, and land mammals like the rodent *hutia* were also eaten (Rouse 1992; Sturtevant 1961).

While the island of Hispaniola contained the largest population of Taino people, and arguably the largest and most complex polities, the islands of Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Cuba were also inhabited by the Taino. Apart from the possible exceptions discussed below, they all spoke fundamentally the same language, and shared all of the characteristics mentioned above. These other islands had a somewhat different history of conquest from Hispaniola, however, not being conquered and colonized by the Spanish until around 1508 and after. The outcome was the same in terms of population decimation and social disintegration, but this delay in colonization allowed for slightly greater survival of assimilated indigenous people, and it probably allowed more people to flee to other areas (Anderson-Córdova 1990).

In a broader comparative frame, the Taino were like other middle-range

hierarchical or “chiefdom” societies in the Americas, such as the Mississippian societies of southeastern North America, and others in Central and South America (Drennan and Uribe 1987). They were smaller in scale and much less complex than the New World’s large empires, the Aztecs and Inca. In size and complexity, and in other interesting structural ways, they were similar to the largest Polynesian chiefdoms (Earle 1991).

## Societies of the Lesser Antilles

The Lesser Antilles had a different history of conquest from the Greater Antilles, which in part enabled Lesser Antillean people to survive the conquest with slightly greater success. Although there was considerable interaction between Europeans and Lesser Antillean people between 1493 and 1624, when colonization began in earnest, it is very difficult to reconstruct a detailed picture of Lesser Antillean life at the time of first contact. About 130 years—perhaps five generations—had passed between their first encounters with Europeans during Columbus’s second voyage and the beginnings of English, French, and Dutch colonization. During this time, things in the Lesser Antilles may have changed considerably.

In the Lesser Antilles, I would argue, Columbus’s “first impression” of a Caribbean divided between the Taino and the Caribs served as a powerful preconception that coloured later Europeans’ interpretations of the people who lived there. Based at least in part on this prejudicial premise, their observations tended to confirm what they expected. Modern scholars can of course evaluate these records critically and carefully, as for the most part they have done, but the data are limited. Where data are inadequate or missing, researchers, like the conquerors before them, must make conjectures based on the most reasonable model, theory, or understanding of the situation. If evidence that contradicts the model accumulates, the model must be re-evaluated.

In this section, the early colonial history and the existing interpretations of the cultural geography of the Lesser Antilles are discussed. Then the archaeological, linguistic, and historical evidence that appears to question this interpretation will be examined.

In 1493, on Columbus’s second voyage, he made landfall in the middle of the Lesser Antilles (Figure 2), sighting the islands of Marie-Galante and Dominica, and landing at Guadeloupe (for description and commentary of Columbus’s second voyage see Dr. Chanca, in Jane 1988). On that island the Spanish encountered numerous villages of twenty to thirty houses, each with a central plaza. While exploring one village, “about thirty women and children whom [the village’s inhabitants] had captured

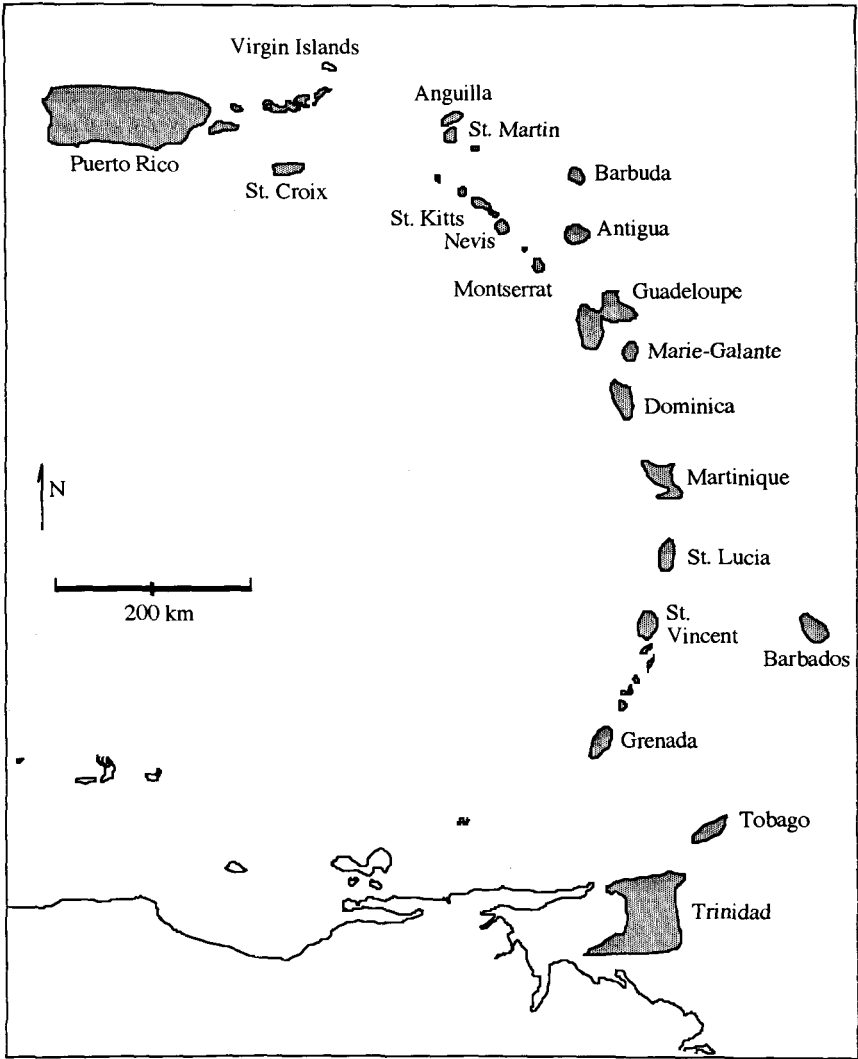


Figure 2 The Lesser Antilles.

in the neighbouring islands and kept either as slaves or to be eaten, took refuge with the Spaniards" (Martyr 1912:71). The women returned to the village that night, but came back to the Spaniards with some of the men the next day. The men, however, refused to come near the Spaniards. Some of the women and children accompanied Columbus through the Leeward Islands towards Puerto Rico, and seemed to possess information about the inhabitants of the individual islands (Martyr 1912:71-77).

Combining this experience with his assumption of enmity between the Taino and Caribs, Columbus believed that all of the people of the Lesser Antilles were Caribs, and that they were engaged in attacking Puerto Rico and the rest of the Greater Antilles.

Over the next century, European documents contain information on interactions between the people of the Lesser Antilles and their indigenous neighbours in the Caribbean and South American mainland, and with Europeans sailing into the Lesser Antilles. These reports document trade with Lesser Antillean people carried out by European vessels landing there after making the Atlantic crossing, slaving raids and punitive attacks carried out by the Spaniards from Puerto Rico or the mainland, and raids carried out by the Indians of the Lesser Antilles on Puerto Rico and the mainland. Although the historical documentation for these activities is incomplete, the period is extremely important, because events of these years very likely altered the political, economic, demographic, and settlement history of the Lesser Antilles.

An important element in understanding these changes is the fact that many indigenous people were moving from island to island during this period. Anderson-Córdova (1990:218–275) has documented the movements of people out of the Greater Antilles, as they fled Spanish conquest. Many from Puerto Rico went to the Lesser Antilles and were reported as far away as Trinidad. At the same time, large numbers of Indians from the other Caribbean islands and surrounding mainlands were being brought into the Greater Antilles as slaves. An estimated 34,000 Indians were brought into Hispaniola and Puerto Rico by 1550 (Anderson-Córdova 1990:267–8).

In 1515, before the conquest of New Spain, Juan Ponce de León landed on Guadeloupe, the largest of the Lesser Antilles, and may have intended to colonize it. As some men were taking on fresh water and a group of women were washing clothes in a stream, they were attacked by a large party, and Ponce was forced to retreat to Puerto Rico, leaving many Spanish as captives (Martyr 1912, I:401–3; Murga 1971; Southey 1827, I: 122).

Even before this event, tremendous animosity existed between the Spaniards and the Lesser Antillean Indians. “Caribs” raided Puerto Rico almost continuously from the time of its Spanish colonization. Raids are reported in 1508, 1509, 1515, 1521, 1528–32, 1538, and 1547. Numerous petitions were filed between 1528 and 1532 demanding that armed vessels and men be provided to cruise against the Caribs. This had been done around 1510 and Carib raiding had diminished, but the Spanish attacks carried out especially in the Virgin and Leeward islands after 1532 were particularly devastating (Boucher 1992; Southey 1827, I:163), totally

depopulating some of the islands: an attack on St. Croix in 1555 effectively ended the indigenous occupation of the island. These attacks, and possibly eastward migration undertaken in fear of them, probably account for the small and seemingly ephemeral Indian populations encountered by the English, French, and Dutch in the northern Lesser Antilles in the 1600s.

In 1526 Serrano led a Spanish attempt to colonize Guadeloupe, in part to capitalize on the expansion of the Bishopric of San Juan granted by the Crown in 1519, and in part to create a "second front" with the intention of reducing Lesser Antillean Indian raids on Puerto Rico (Boromé 1966:32-3). This colonization attempt was also quickly repulsed.

By 1550, English and French interest in the Caribbean was increasing. After a few small-scale attempts to participate in trade in the Spanish Caribbean, or to capture vessels returning to Spain, English activity in the region increased dramatically in the 1580s and 1590s. Most of their expeditions were against the Spanish, and the Lesser Antilles were convenient places to make landfall in the Caribbean to replenish their ships before moving westward to the mainland coasts or the Greater Antilles. Sir Francis Drake visited Dominica and St. Kitts in 1585 with a fleet of 25 vessels (Hakluyt 1904, Vol. X); John White also traded peacefully on Dominica in 1590, describing the interaction as follows: "The first of May in the morning many of the Salvages came aboard our ships in their canowes, and did traffique with us; we also the same day landed and entered their towne whence we returned the same day aboard without any resistance of the Salvages; or any offence done to them" (Burrage 1906:308). Between 1580 and 1600, 24 more or less peaceful English landfalls are recorded in the Lesser Antilles, and these continued into the 1600s.

When English parties attempted to establish permanent settlements in the Lesser Antilles, however, they were almost immediately resisted by the people who lived there. In 1605 Captain Nicholas St. John and 66 others, fearing that their ship could not make it back to England, resolved to colonize St. Lucia. For six weeks they were on relatively peaceful terms with the islanders and one of their leaders, *Augramert*. Peaceful relations eventually broke down. A party including Saint John went exploring the island for gold and never returned; finally, those remaining were attacked by a party of 300 Indians. Four days later 1,400 Caribs arrived by canoe from other islands. All but 19 of the Europeans were killed, and 12 of the survivors were wounded. Some of the local Caribs brought them food, and *Antonie*, reportedly *Augramert's* brother, traded them a canoe with which to flee. He told them that *Augramert* was coming from St. Vincent the next day with 12 canoes to finish them off (Southey 1827, I:236; Purchas 1905 [1625] IV:1257). An attempt was made by the English to colonize Grenada in 1609, with a similar result.

By 1610 the Indian population of the Lesser Antilles was greatly diminished. The Virgin Islands and Leeward Islands west of St. Kitts had been virtually abandoned. Indian raids on Puerto Rico had ceased, and the largest unconquered indigenous populations lived on the largest of the Windward Islands—Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent.

About the Indians of these islands, a great deal of information is available. In the mid-1600s French missionaries lived among the people they called *Caraïbes*, and provided ethnographic detail of remarkable breadth and depth (Bouton 1640; Breton 1665, 1978; De la Paix 1647 [Rennard 1929]; Du Puis 1652 [1972]; Du Tertre 1667; Labat 1642 [1970]; La Borde 1674; Rochefort 1658). Père Raymond Breton in particular provides detailed observations of the people of Dominica, and notes that in the language spoken by men they called themselves *Kallinago* (and in the language spoken by women *Kallipuna*). A fascinating aspect of this record of the *Caraïbes*, noted by Allaire in a recent paper (Allaire n.d.: 9), is that,

. . . the learned French missionaries in their historical and ethnographic accounts in which they often debate the origins of the Caribs, seem to have been in total ignorance of the earlier existence of the Tainos in the Greater Antilles despite the fact that French translations of the major sources . . . had been available in French by the late 1550s . . .

Sociopolitical institutions among the seventeenth century *Caraïbes*, as recorded by the French, were considerably less complex than those described for the Taino of the Greater Antilles. The missionaries' accounts and modern scholars are generally agreed that there was a pattern of autonomous villages consisting of extended families led by patriarchal headmen. Occasionally, men from several villages would participate in wartime confederacies under the leadership of once or more *ubutu*, or war chiefs (Rouse 1948:555). The war chief apparently held the position for life, and enjoyed special treatment during feasts and times of war. These leaders were reported to have been more polygamous than headmen, yet did not seem to enjoy an extraordinary (i.e. non-producing) economic position, nor did they receive extraordinary mortuary treatment in death (Dreyfus 1976:90–91; Rouse 1948:558–559).

From seventeenth century accounts it appears that centrifugal or disintegrative forces kept multi-village polities from becoming permanent. One often-cited reason for this was a strong sense of political independence among the Caribs. Labat observed that:

there are no people in the world so jealous of their liberty, or who resent more the smallest check to their freedom. They laugh at us for obeying and

respecting our rulers, and say that we must be their slaves, and that since we allow them to give us orders we must also be cowards (Labat 1970: 104).

In contrast to the Taino of the Greater Antilles, those described by the French clearly had a less complex sociopolitical system. There were fewer distinct levels within the social and political hierarchy, and higher status conferred fewer tangible rewards. The position of *ubutu* or war chief, as noted, was temporary, restricted to times of war. As Dreyfus (1976:89; original emphasis) observes, however:

One ought not say that the Caraïbes had not chiefs "save in times of war", for they were at war all the time. Among them, war was not an accident, a disruption of normal life; it was an element of their social structure, a condition without which the network of kinship relations and alliances, residence patterns, exchange of goods, and rituals of initiation and accession to chiefship, would not exist.

Some forms of authority and power are *permanently* attached to the functions of a war chief, who is, in fact, a political chief, and structural inequalities are well attested in the Caraïbe system.

Descent and residence patterns among the Caribs are difficult to reconstruct, and although their characterization as a matrilineal society (Steward 1948:25) is probably broadly correct, there is additional variability and complexity in the social norms covering these matters. To the extent that descent was carefully reckoned, which does not appear from the seventeenth century documents to be great, there seems to be a form of double descent, with men determining descent through the patriline and women through their matriline. Rouse (1948:558) categorized residence patterns as matrilocal, while acknowledging that several deviations from this model existed; he noted that patrilocality was common among higher-ranking males, and that occasionally girls might be raised in the family of their affianced male. Dreyfus also remarks that "a *man of ordinary status* would go, upon his marriage, to live in the village where the *father* of his bride was headman" (1976:90; original emphasis). Dreyfus concurs that among higher-ranking heads of villages, different patterns applied.

It must be remembered, however, that observations of descent and residence patterns among the Caribs, from which these interpretations derive, were made after Carib populations had been severely affected by more than a century of warfare, population decline, and relocation from island to island. The difficulties in reconstructing clear patterns of social organization almost certainly stem from this fact. An example of the potential interpretive problems raised is Père Labat's observation of widespread polygamy among Carib men of ordinary status (Labat 1970: 76-7); this contradicts the general reconstruction of marriage patterns in

which only headmen or men of higher status would marry more than one woman.

The Carib economy, like that of the Taino of the Greater Antilles, and many groups on the mainland, was based on bitter and sweet manioc as staple crops, along with a variety of other root crops, tree crops, peppers, probably some maize, and abundant wild plant foods. Crab, fish, and shellfish were the predominant sources of animal protein, although terrestrial mammals like indigenous rodents and the imported *agouti* played a part (Allaire 1977; Labat 1970; Rouse 1948; Sturtevant 1961; Wing 1989).

### Problems Concerning the Nature and Origins of the Lesser Antillean Population

The material discussed in the previous section represents the most complete ethnographic description available for any indigenous group in the Caribbean. This rich data, coupled with the durable assumption that there were just two dominant groups in the Antilles, has prompted many modern scholars both to combine all of the observations of French missionaries from many islands into a composite ethnography of Carib lifeways, and to extend those ethnographic insights to all of the Lesser Antilles. The assumption thus engendered parallels the earliest Spanish interpretation—that the Lesser Antilles were occupied a relatively uniform group of people.

Also based on the seventeenth century missionary accounts is the interpretation that these “Island Caribs” were recent emigrants to the Caribbean. This interpretation is made explicit (although with considerable variation) in the origins stories recorded by the French missionaries. This raises some of the most difficult issues in Caribbean ethnohistory and archaeology: who were the “Island Caribs”, where did they come from, and when?

Two broad models, with variations, have been proposed to account for the archaeological, linguistic, historical, and ethnographic information concerning the Island Caribs: in one, called here and elsewhere the “Carib invasion” model, the Island Caribs were descended from mainland Caribs who in the centuries before European contact had conquered some or all of the Lesser Antilles; in the other, called here the “Arawakan continuity” model, the people now called Island Caribs, who inhabited all of the Lesser Antilles in 1492, were descended from the same people as the Greater Antillean Taino. Divergent trajectories of cultural change had made them relatively distinct from Taino between A.D. 500 and 1000, with the latter developing the complex social and political institutions that were apparent in the Taino chiefdoms.



The Carib invasion model was based in part on the earliest Spanish impression that the Taino and the Caribs were very different societies. More directly, it was supported by the seventeenth century French missionaries' documentation of Lesser Antillean peoples' stories of their origins, which spoke of an invasion of either Galibi or Kalina people from the South American mainland (for discussion of these origins stories and their implications for an invasion scenario see Allaire 1977, 1980, 1991; Boucher 1992; Rouse 1948; Sued Badillo 1978). In this model, a fundamentally Arawakan or Maipuran (Payne 1991) language was spoken by everyone. Men also used mainland Cariban lexical elements in a pidgin "men's language". In this view the men's language would be explained by the invaders' practice of killing men and sparing women and children. As generations passed with Arawakan-speaking women raising children, the mainland Cariban syntax was lost, and only part of the Cariban lexicon was retained by men (Taylor and Hoff 1980). In a similar way, the lack of an obvious discontinuity in the style of ceramics would be explained by the continuity in matrilineal succession implied by this model, and the ethnographically reasonable assumption that women made the pottery: regardless of the real or fictive ethnicity of their spouses, women would raise their daughters to make pots as they had learned to make them.

The second explanation for the historical identity of the Lesser Antillean people might be called the Arawakan continuity model. Following Sued Badillo (1979), its proponents argue that the Taino and Caribs shared a similar culture and history of colonization, with the overall character of the two groups diverging markedly as the Taino's hierarchical social and political institutions emerged. (Davis and Goodwin 1990; Gillick 1980, 1985). The cultural divergences that had developed were in this view greatly exaggerated by the Spaniards, who used the charge of cannibalism as an excuse to kill or enslave the peoples of the Lesser Antilles (Hulme 1986; Myers 1984; Whitehead 1988). In this formulation the Carib "men's language" is explained as a *lingua franca* used for trade with mainland peoples.

The scholarly deliberation of these positions over the last decade has been intense (Allaire 1987, 1990, n.d.; Boucher 1992; Davis and Goodwin 1990; Rouse 1986, 1992). Given the complexities of the archaeological, historical, linguistic, and ethnographic data which bear on the situation, persuasive evidence can be found to support both positions. Here, arguing generally for the view of the pre-conquest Caribbean as a complicated ethnic mosaic, and specifically for an interpretation of the post-conquest Caribbean that allows for both emigration and cultural continuity, I would raise a few issues that cause problems for both models.

Most of the points of disagreement that follow are situations in which the

historical and archaeological data do not correspond well. Perhaps the most striking disagreement between the two data sets is that "Island Carib" sites have not, to date, been identified archaeologically (Allaire 1990; Davis and Goodwin 1990; Rouse 1986, 1992). Archaeologists working in other regions, and even some working in the Caribbean, view this fact with amazement. Given the "Carib invasion" model that was for so long widely accepted, the absence of an archaeological "Carib horizon" was troublesome. The lack of archaeological evidence for conquest or population replacement has been an important part of the "Arawakan continuity" model.

Two ceramic assemblages have been attributed to emigrating Caribs, the Suazoid series and the Cayo complex. Suazoid ceramics were suggested by Pinchon (1952) and Bullen (1964) to represent the Carib invasion, but later work (Allaire 1977, 1990; Boomert 1987) has suggested that the production of Suazoid pottery ceased everywhere in the Caribbean between A.D. 1300 and 1450 (Boomert 1987:32). Boomert (1986, 1987) argues that Suazoid ceramics were replaced by ceramics of the Cayo complex on the Windward Islands from Grenada to Martinique. Boomert relates these ceramics to the Koraibo ceramics of the Guianas. While they represent a tantalizing element to be included in future interpretations, it is felt that the prehistoric Cayo ceramics need more complete description, and the strength of association between them and the Koraibo ceramics needs further research.

Even if the postulated links between Cayo ceramics and the ethno-historically known Amerindian people of the Caribbean are borne out by future research, there are still troublesome issues in linking the historic and the archaeological records. Cayo complex ceramics are reported only as far north as Martinique (Boomert 1987:16-17), but, as noted above, Columbus identified people as Caribs all the way from Grenada to Guadeloupe to St. Croix.

In Dr. Chanca's account of Columbus's second voyage (Jane 1988), the Virgin Islands are described as inhabited by people again called Caribes. The Indian women whom the Spaniards had taken aboard at Guadeloupe described the people of what was probably St. Croix (cf. Allaire 1987) to be Caribs. Lying off that island, the fleet encountered a canoe with four men, two women, and a boy. Some Spaniards in a ship's boat tried to capture them and a battle ensued. At least one Indian was killed and the others captured. The Indians used bows and arrows, interpreted by the Spanish as a Carib trait, and in describing the event, Chanca recorded other characteristics of the Caribes: long hair and elaborate designs painted on their faces.

On this evidence, and the extensive evidence of "Caribe" raids on

Puerto Rico that were thought to have been launched from St. Croix, Figueredo (1978) describes St. Croix as a major Carib centre. As Murga (1971) and Allaire (1987) note, however, when Ponce de León set out to crush the people of St. Croix, he pressed into service interpreters from Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico, suggesting that their language was more like that spoken on the Greater Antilles.

The westernmost Lesser Antilles, especially St. Croix, show strong archaeological similarities with Puerto Rico. Only one ball court (associated with the Taino ball game mentioned above) has been found in the Lesser Antilles, and it is on St. Croix (Hatt 1924; Olsen 1974). The pottery of the Taino has been called Chican Ostinoid, and it is found in the Virgin and Leeward islands out as far east as Saba (although in very small amounts, Hofman and Hoogland 1991). Rouse (1992:32) labels the Leeward Islands people "Eastern Taino", and is careful to avoid accepting uncritically the Spanish term *Caribe*, which in the Caribbean was applied to almost all potentially hostile people.

In the Leeward Islands, the islands lying between Guadeloupe and the Virgin Islands, there is no archaeological evidence of population replacement in the late prehistoric period. Instead there is remarkable ceramic continuity from about A.D. 600 until the end of aboriginal occupation (Goodwin 1979; Watters 1980; Wilson 1989). Even in places where there is historical evidence for "Carib" populations, the archaeological evidence at present is indistinguishable from that from the centuries before.

At the southern end of the Lesser Antilles, Trinidad, and to the east Barbados, also have evidence showing the complexities of the cultural map in the late prehistoric and early historic periods. Even Spanish slavers, who had an economic incentive to view every indigenous person as a Carib, saw that Trinidad was culturally different from the Windward Islands. In 1510 a Spanish slaver named Juan Bono captured 180 Indians on Trinidad, and 185 in 1516. These people, however, were considered to be *Allouagues*, people who were culturally and linguistically distinct from the Island Caribs. This observation is supported by the archaeological sequence from Trinidad, which is distinct from those of the Windwards and more similar to the complex situations that obtained in northeastern South America (Boomert 1987; Rouse 1992). The distinction was formally acknowledged in 1520, when the Spanish amended the decision that Caribs could be captured as slaves in order to exclude the Indians of Trinidad, Margarita, Barbados, Gigante, and the Lucayaos (Southey 1827, I:147). The order to exclude Barbados also implies that the people there were not considered to be Caribs. The order may have come too late to save the population of Barbados, however. Although earlier European accounts noted many Amerindian settlements on Barbados, reports from Rodrigo de Figueroa

in 1518, and Pedro a Campus in 1536, indicated that the island was uninhabited (Beckles 1990:1; Drewett 1991:14). In summary, historical and archaeological evidence from the Lesser Antilles suggests that there is more cultural heterogeneity than has been recognized. Recent arguments have tended to accept the frame of the Carib invasion versus the Arawakan continuity models. This frame is imposed by the two primary sources of data, archaeology and documents, both of which are prone to produce a rather homogenized view: the nuances of cultural and ethnic diversity are poorly reflected in archaeological evidence (Dragadze 1980; Flannery and Marcus 1983), and the sixteenth century Spaniards were not inclined to sort out the cultural geography of a region whose only immediate economic value was as a source of slaves. By the time the French, Dutch, English, and other European groups moved in to conquer the Lesser Antilles after 1620, the indigenous situation was very likely quite different from what it was in 1492.

Although speculative, I feel it is more likely that the prehistoric and early historic Lesser Antilles contained a complex mosaic of ethnic groups which had considerable interaction with each other, the mainland, and the Greater Antilles. As now, the individual islands and island groups would have become populous trading centres or isolated backwaters according to the abundance of their resources, the strength of their social and political ties with other centres, and their unique histories of colonization and cultural change.

## Problems Concerning the Cultural Geography of the Greater Antilles at the time of European Conquest

As has been discussed, in the Lesser Antilles there are incongruities between the early Spanish interpretations, the ethnohistorical documents, and the archaeological record. The same is true to a lesser extent in the Greater Antilles, and there are also ethnohistorical observations that suggest that there were groups of isolated hunter-gatherers. The latter have been interpreted as relics of the Indians who occupied the Greater Antilles before the major immigration of ceramic-producing, horticultural people around A.D. 600.

The strongest evidence for diversity among the Taino population comes from northeastern Hispaniola, where the Spanish conquerors discovered one and possibly two groups that were different in significant ways from the rest of the people of Hispaniola. The *Ciguayo* or *Macorix* people of northeastern Hispaniola were described as being different in body painting, hair style, armament, language, and behaviour from the rest of the Taino people (Wilson 1990a).

The first evidence for these differences comes from Columbus's record of the first voyage. After leaving 39 Spaniards at the settlement called Navidad after the Santa María was wrecked, the other two ships headed east along the north coast of Hispaniola. On the Samaná peninsula at the northeastern tip of the island, the Spaniards encountered people who used bows and arrows, one of whom was described by Columbus as,

. . . quite ugly in appearance, more so than others that he had seen. He had his face all stained with charcoal, although everywhere they are accustomed to staining themselves with different colors. He wore all his hair very long, gathered and tied behind and then put in a small net of parrot feathers . . . the Admiral judged that he must be from the Caribs who eat men . . . And if they are not Caribs, at least they must be from the frontiers and of the same customs and be men without fear, not like the others of the other islands, who are cowards and, beyond understanding, without arms (Dunne and Kelley 1988:329–235).

As has been discussed above, the Spaniards' ideas concerning the "Caribs" were quite vague at this time, referring generally to warlike people in the east. As the Spaniards learned more of the Caribbean peoples, however, additional evidence accumulated to suggest that the people of northeastern Hispaniola were different from those on the rest of the island, and in some ways similar to the people they encountered in the Lesser Antilles. The description just given, for example, is similar to that of the Lesser Antillean people of Dominica recorded by Breton (1929:55).

At the back they let [their hair] fall on their shoulders. When they go somewhere they tuck it up behind their heads, tie it with roucou-dyed cotton ornamental knots with at their tips a small tuft or a thimble. Some spread on the mass of their hair fine white cotton, with feathers of different hues stuck into it.

Columbus named the site of the violent encounter on Samaná *Bahía de las Flechas*—Bay of the Arrows—because of the weapons the native people used. In part because such weapons had not been seen in the other places they had visited, the bows and arrows these men used were described in detail:

The bows . . . were as big as those of France and England; the arrows are very much like the javelins of the other people he had seen up to that time, made from cane shoots which, when they are planted, remain very straight for a length of one *vara* and a half or two *varas* [a *vara* is 83.7 cm or 2.75 feet]. And afterwards they put at the end a piece of sharp wood one palm and a half long, and on top of this little stick some insert a fish tooth; and some or most of them put poison there. (Dunn and Kelley 1988:339–341)

The descriptions of the bows and arrows of the Lesser Antillean people are very similar. Père Labat describes them as follows:

The bow of the Caribs is about six feet long . . . The arrows are about three feet six inches long including the point. The shaft is made from the top shoot of the *Roseau* which grows every year when the plant flowers. The point . . . is made of Bois Verd [a very hard wood] and diminishes evenly from the splice to the point. The whole point is carved into barbs so that it is impossible to pull it out of a wound without making the hole larger . . . These arrows are poisoned . . . (Labat 1970:73–74).

Although there are some similarities in traits between the fifteenth century people of Hispaniola and the seventeenth century people of the Lesser Antilles, they are insufficient to posit a direct link between the two peoples. If such a connection existed, it will have to be reconstructed through archaeological investigations. Nevertheless, the ethnohistoric evidence from northeastern Hispaniola further supports the view that the Caribbean islands were culturally more heterogeneous than is commonly assumed. For the Greater Antilles, the strongest evidence for this diversity comes from discussions of the languages of the people of Hispaniola.

In the early years of the conquest Columbus sent a Jeronymite friar named Ramón Pané to live among the people called *Macorix* in northeastern Hispaniola (Pané 1974; Stevens Arroyo 1988:74–78; Wilson 1990a). A year later Columbus directed Pané to go to live in Hispaniola's central valley, with the cacique or chieftain named Guarionex. Pané protested: "Lord, how is it that Your Lordship wishes that I go to live with Guarionex without knowing any language other than that of the *Macorix*?" (Pané 1974:49–50; Stevens Arroyo's translation, 1988:76).

Bartolomé de Las Casas also noted the diversity of languages spoken on Hispaniola, suggesting that apart from the most widespread language, there were two other languages spoken in the northeastern part of the island:

There were three distinct languages in this island, which were mutually unintelligible: the first was of the people we called the Lower *Macorix*, and the other of the people of Upper *Macorix* . . . The other language was the universal one for all of the land, and was the most elegant and contained the most words, and was the most sweet in sound (Las Casas 1967:Lib. III, Cap. CXCVII, II:331).

The archaeological evidence that would bear on the question of cultural diversity on Hispaniola is not extensive. To my knowledge, no archaeological research has been directed at the question of cultural differences in the northeastern Dominican Republic. Published descriptions of archaeological ceramics from the region suggest that they correspond to Rouse's (1992:32, 110–112) Chican Ostionoid subseries (e.g. Krieger 1929, 1930, 1931). As Veloz Maggiolo (1972:107–8) notes, however, there is considerable regional diversity in the ceramics of this group.

The other Greater Antillean group that scholars have considered to be culturally distinct from the Taino are the Guanahatabeys, who were characterized as hunting and gathering people living on the western fringes of the Taino world. During the conquest of Cuba, the Taino people who were acting as local informants for the Spaniards described people who did not grow food or live in villages (Sauer 1966:184). Las Casas also noted that people he called "Guanahacabibes" lived at the western tip of Cuba, and that they had little interaction with the Taino people of the rest of the island. Keegan (1989), following Lovén (1935), has argued that there is insufficient evidence to confirm the existence of such people and that they are probably the product of an uncritical reading of the historical documents by modern scholars. The tremendous cultural disruption brought about by European conquest certainly could have forced people to leave their homes and move as far away from the Spanish as they could—as hunter-gatherers if they had to. On the other hand, the Guanahatabey could very well be another example suggesting that the pre-Columbian Caribbean had greater cultural diversity than was, or is, generally recognized. At present, however, the evidence does not seem to be conclusive either way. Forthcoming publications by Cuban scholars will very likely shed light on the issue (Estrella Rey, personal communication).

## Discussion and Conclusions

In the last half-century, new evidence concerning Caribbean prehistory has accumulated. It has been interpreted in new ways, and has prompted the reinterpretation of existing archaeological and historical data. The conclusions reached by early European conquerors concerning the cultural geography of the Caribbean are being challenged. The interpretation developed by Columbus and others that the Caribbean contained two dominant and inclusive cultural groups, Arawaks and Caribs, has served as a useful model for some time, but now it can be viewed as an oversimplification.

On present evidence, this model is still generally sound at a broad level, but for both the Greater and Lesser Antilles, there is strong evidence that greater cultural diversity existed among the indigenous people of the Caribbean than the conquerors understood. In the Greater Antilles three or perhaps four societies existed (for which we have some evidence) who spoke mutually unintelligible languages. There may have been even greater diversity in the Lesser Antilles, but it has been obscured in part by the century that elapsed between the time that European influence was felt in those islands and the time that observers made careful records concerning the indigenous people who lived there.

Both historical and archaeological evidence suggests that the proto-historic situation was far more complex than the modern debate between "Carib invasion" and "Arawakan continuity" models would indicate. The fact that the two interpretations are so radically different is itself an illustration of the difficulties that are inherent in this set of historical and archaeological data. It also demonstrates that cultural dynamics of the late prehistoric and contact period situation are not all that well understood.

Acknowledging the potential cultural complexity of the prehistoric Caribbean, considering it to have been, for example, similar to the complicated multi-cultural situation in the historic Guianas and the middle and lower Orinoco, makes it possible for both of these models to be valid to some degree. However, the idea that all of the Lesser Antilles were culturally or linguistically homogeneous, as people promoting some version of both of these models have argued, is unlikely. Our task now is not to argue for one of the generalizations, but to unravel to a greater extent the complexities of Caribbean prehistory.

Rouse (1986:128 and elsewhere) noted that it should not be assumed that distances of open water were barriers to interaction among prehistoric Caribbean people. He argued instead that given early Caribbean peoples' canoes and skills, passages between islands linked people, and land masses isolated them. In the present discussion, this idea might be elaborated upon in two ways: first, we should reject the idea that "island chronologies" must be comprehensive—that at a point in time the archaeological characteristics of one part of an island should be the same as those on the other parts of the island. This idea has been largely rejected in the Greater Antilles, but in the Lesser Antilles the possibility of multi-cultural islands is not widely considered. A second, related point is that we should question the assumption that cultural continuity requires proximity, that groups of people of the same culture must live on contiguous islands. This is certainly not the case in the modern Caribbean, where Spanish, French, Dutch, and English islands are interspersed, and we should be open to similar possibilities in the preconquest Caribbean.

Finally, the contemporary Caribbean cannot be viewed as completely unrelated to the situations that existed in prehistory. The most recent wave of conquest and colonization that began in 1492 is probably more analogous to previous conquests than is acknowledged. What happened over the last 500 years might be characterized as follows, but it is argued that these statements might apply equally to the historic and prehistoric Caribbean: the news of rich new territories initiated fierce competition among related ethnic groups from a continent that could safely reach those territories by sea; each group staked its claims and thereafter contested and re-negotiated them constantly, producing a changing mosaic of cultures



in the islands. As the generations passed, the people who came responded to changing political, social, and environmental circumstances, becoming more and more distinct from the people of the places from which they came. Most groups maintained trade links with their homelands. For many generations, most individuals spoke both the transformed vernacular language of their island and the language of their homeland, and many spoke the languages of the people on surrounding islands.

Centuries (or millennia) later, however, outsiders who knew little of the history and cultural nuances that separated the people of the various islands, or who had access only to fragmentary evidence of a few aspects of their material life, might compartmentalize all of the people of the Caribbean into one or two cultural groups.

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